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DEAD MEN'S SHOES.

368

A ROMANCE.

BY

Mrs. JEANNETTE R. HADERMANN, *Walden*

AUTHOR OF "FORGIVEN AT LAST."

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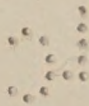
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TO

THE PEOPLE OF TENSAS PARISH, LOUISIANA,

THE HOME FRIENDS WHO WELCOMED MY FIRST CRUDE
EFFORT SO CORDIALLY,

AND JUDGED IT SO LENIENTLY,

I Dedicate this Volume,

IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THEIR KINDNESS.

JEANNETTE R. HADERMANN.

THE PEOPLE OF ALABAMA, 1865

AND THE PEOPLE OF THE TERRITORY OF ALABAMA, 1865

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DEAD MEN'S SHOES.

CHAPTER I.

IS INTRODUCTORY.

ACCEPTING as correct in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, the principle that "first impressions are everything," I have selected the gloaming of one of the pleasantest days in that pleasantest of months, May, as a propitious time for introducing to your notice some of the most important personages among those destined to figure in these pages. I shall give them the benefit of all the adventitious attractions at my command, after which, if they fail to gain your good opinion, or, having gained it, fail to retain it, with themselves, and not with their historian, rest the blame.

As to time, it is sufficient for my purpose to state that this story has a margin somewhere between the years eighteen hundred and eighteen hundred and seventy.

As to locality, it is sufficient for your purpose to inform you that the theater of the events about to be recorded is situated upon the shores of one of the most charming of the many inland lakes that dimple the broad fair face of lower Louisiana.

Those who know this secluded spot at all, know it as "Silver Lake," so called from the silvery whiteness of its waters, I presume. But it has never yet attained,

and it is more than probable never will attain, to the glory of representation in the atlas.

Silver Lake is a pretty, no-shaped sheet of water, whose gently sloping banks are fringed with a tall coarse grass of the most vivid green, and shaded by the cypress, the button-willow, and the water-oak. It boasts of a circumference of some sixteen or eighteen miles, and its shores on both sides are ornamented by the handsomely-appointed and neatly-kept premises of the cotton plantations which "front" upon the lake-shore.

These mansion-houses are few in number and scattered widely apart, for the estates to which they individually belong embrace many hundred acres each.

The individuals with whom we have to do on this particular May evening were the owners of one of the least pretentious estates on the whole lakeside; but, unpretentious as it was, and as little claim as it had to be anything else, it aspired, in common with its better-appointed neighbors, to the dignity of a distinctive appellation, and was pretty generally known as "Tanglewood." The significance of this designation will presently make itself apparent.

The dwelling at "Tanglewood" was a rambling frame house, a story and a half high, which had originally been painted a dull slate color. Owing to atmospheric influences, however, and to time's defacing touch, the slate color had resolved itself into a dingy bluish-white, strongly suggestive of the complexion produced by the too frequent use of mercurial remedies. One Cyclopean dormer-window pierced the roof, looking out upon the shed of the broad veranda, which is as essential a consideration in Southern architecture as the walls of the house themselves. A balustrade that had once possessed some claim to architectual ornamentation, inclosed this veranda; but what with long, yawning spaces in one place, and straight, unpainted slips, newly inserted, in others, it was certainly *not* a thing of beauty, nor a joy forever, unless, perhaps, to the carpenter, who found in it a perennial job.

Precisely in the middle of a most uncompromisingly square yard sat this domicile,—a yard covering about an acre of land, inclosed by a superannuated picket-fence grown gray with age, and dotted thickly over with prides of China, paper mulberries, and tall cotton-woods, all growing in reckless luxuriance wherever they had chosen to locate themselves, for the yard at Tanglewood was as entirely a piece of nature's handiwork as was the most tangled forest thicket. So much for externals.

Within the house, things were a degree more inviting, for whereas, externally, Tanglewood wore a rickety devil-may-care face, there was evidently within-doors a presiding spirit striving industriously to make the very best of a very bad bargain. The house was furnished decidedly poorly, as houses in that neighborhood went; but every once in awhile one would come unexpectedly upon some handsome, old-fashioned article of furniture, such as the elegant mirrored armoire which adorned their only spare bedroom, or the richly-carved sideboard which sat in the dining-room, supporting its minimum of shabby pressed glass and dingy plated-ware with such stately dignity, and looking so sadly out of keeping with its meager surroundings, or a solitary vase of rare china or some unique costly trifle would present itself in the form of suggestive hints as to the auld lang syne of the Tanglewood people.

In strong contrast with these luxurious inheritances, stood the various necessary articles invented by the presiding genius before mentioned. Witness that long, low, exceedingly comfortable lounge, invitingly draped in pretty bright chintz, which, on certain inevitable occasions (for the best of chintz will soil eventually), is stripped of its cloak of charity, and stands forth in native ugliness, an old white-pine box; and that cosy-looking arm-chair, a regular Sleepy Hollow affair, corresponding in color and pattern with the drapery of that deceitful lounge, is so cunningly scooped out of

an old flour-barrel, and padded and cushioned and fringed, that all pity for the necessity for the makeshift is merged into admiration of the contriver's ingenuity.

But I am not going to expose all the secrets of Tanglewood. I have told you enough to prepare you for the shocking, deplorable, disgraceful announcement that its inmates were poor! undeniably, unmitigatedly, ungenteelly poor!

The family upon whom this heavy ban had descended consisted of a father and three daughters. Collectively and familiarly known as "old Major Snowe and the Snowe girls;" individually, as "Major Benjamin Snowe, Miss Snowe (baptized Agnes), Miss Becky Snowe, and Miss Julia Snowe."

I propose introducing them to you individually and formally, as they are all grouped together on the veranda, "in position, smiling, and at ease," in the cool of the May-day evening on which my story opens.

Leaning back in a large willow arm-chair, with the contented aspect of a man who is just entering upon a well-earned rest, sits Major Benjamin Snowe, the head of the family. Physically speaking, a fine enough looking head. Practically speaking, however, no head at all. He has between his lips his inevitable pipe, while in his right hand he still clutches the victorious little pawn that has just decided a hardly-contested battle in his favor, and as he sends the curling wreaths of vapor floating out upon the soft spring air, he glances across the little table which separates him from his conquered foe, with mirthful triumph in his keen blue eyes.

Major Snowe—though wherefore "Major" not even the oldest inhabitant could satisfactorily explain—was a hale, handsome old man, who had managed to preserve his haleness and handsomeness far beyond the prime of life by sheer force of doing as little as possible, thinking as little as possible, and "worrying" as

little as possible. In his most impressible years he had learned how "care killed a cat," and bravely resolved not to endure a like melancholy fate.

A long time ago he had come into the neighborhood of Silver Lake, as a transient visitor to a college friend. Had fallen in love with, and been fallen in love with, by the sister of that college friend. Had married her and entered into possession and mastership of her property, consisting of a fine cotton plantation, entirely unencumbered with debt, and a goodly number of "hands." Had made her a very good husband up to the time of her death, had missed her sadly after that event, had never cared enough for any other woman to replace her, but had contented himself with staying quietly at home, mismanaging everything in the most systematic manner, and, in short, acted on the principle of doing as little as possible, thinking as little as possible, and worrying as little as possible, with such pre-eminent success, that he had managed to encumber his wife's originally fine property with mortgage after mortgage, until it would have required the acumen of a Philadelphia lawyer to tell who was the largest shareholder in the poor old plantation at the time treated of.

Major Snowe entertained a vague hope, and still vaguer intention, of lifting all these mortgages at some unknown time in the dim future, but the how or the when were by no means clear to the poor muddle-headed financier.

His one fixed idea was that they must all economize, and he hurled that threadbare word economy at the heads of his hapless daughters in season and out of season, as if the mere reiteration of the word was all that was necessary to clear them of debt and raise them to the highest pinnacle of affluence and (consequent) earthly bliss.

Yet, he was by no means a rigid disciplinarian. He was merely a theoretical economist, who would have been more surprised than pleased to see his own theo-

ries brought practically to bear upon his own household. His daughters had done pretty much as they chose ever since it had pleased inscrutable Providence to take away the real head of the family, in the person of their mother,—a wise, energetic little woman, as cheery as a sunbeam,—and leave them to the sole guardianship of a careless, unpractical, dreamy father.

He had very little curiosity as to the manner in which his girls disposed of their unlimited supply of time,—nor did he require an annoyingly minute account of how they spent their very limited supply of pin-money. On one point alone was he exacting, and that was on the all-important one of his daily game of chess. Strange to say, this otherwise supremely indolent, almost apathetic, old man, had one grand passion, and that was for the mimic warfare of the chess-table. On this one point he was fiercely exacting, as the Misses Snowe knew to their cost.

Now, as his daughters one and all loathed the game of chess, and in the privacy of their own rooms roundly anathematized the inventor of that noble amusement, he could hardly have devised a more ingenious method of making his one parental exaction peculiarly odious.

In order to divide the daily torment impartially, Agnes, the eldest sister, had instituted the decision by lot, as to who should be the victim.

So there was a hurried, but furtive, drawing of straws whenever the regular post-prandial, "Come, one of you," resounded through the hall, summoning one of them to the torture-chamber.

On this particular evening, the conquered foe, at whom Major Snowe was blinking in such malicious triumph, was his youngest born,—Miss Julia Snowe,—she having been the luckless drawer of the shortest straw.

The expression of her countenance, as she pushes her chair impatiently back from the chess-table, is none of the most amiable; but I am afraid it is hardly fair to draw her portrait at this particular juncture. Please,

therefore, take into consideration, that if, as a truthful chronicler I am compelled to say, there was a decided shade of peevishness on her really pretty face, I am drawing her on chess-day, and do not be overhasty in condemning. Her expression was pretty much such as we all wear when just released from the dentist's chair, and her feelings were also typical, I imagine, of that escape from purgatory.

But to give you the promised description. She was smaller than either of her two older sisters, slight in figure and graceful in bearing. Willowy, I think, is the word that best describes her general appearance. She had wavy brown hair, soft and glossy, that grew low on her snowy-white forehead, and drooped gracefully behind her pretty pink ears. She had very dark-blue eyes, with long, fringy black lashes, curling up at the ends, and giving to her eyes a deeper, more soulful look than they were really entitled to. She had hands and feet almost childish in their diminutive daintiness,—useless little hands and lazy little feet. Hands that seemed made for no better purpose than toying with fans or plucking roses; feet that carried their fair owner listlessly and languidly over the beaten track of a pretty and soulless woman's useless existence.

In her motions she was grace itself. She did not walk—she floated. She was also the happy possessor of that good thing in woman, a low, sweet voice,—she did not talk, she murmured. With such a list of charms, how can you blame her if she fell into the error of thinking that she had performed her part in the great plan of existence by simply being what she was, Miss Julia Snowe, a beautiful nonentity?

Between the names of Agnes Snowe and Julia Snowe on the record of births, in the old family Bible, came the name of Becky Snowe, or rather, to quote more literally from the record, "Rebecca M. Snowe." As she had entered the world, and as she figured upon the family record, so had she grown up a sort of mean between two extremes. She was a little taller than

Julia, without having attained the stately height of Agnes. She was the owner of a pair of kindly gray eyes, that had neither the languishing gentleness of Julia's blue orbs, nor yet the repellant coldness of Agnes's steely gaze. Her mouth, also, maintained the appointed medium between Julia's rosebud aperture, which wore a perpetual smile (for outsiders), and her elder sister's scornfully curving lip. Her hands, albeit rather larger than any woman likes her hands to be, were white and shapely, and seemed made for better things than fans and roses, though they might never achieve the glorious destiny of being decked with jeweled rings, as Agnes's taper white fingers most undoubtedly would be, if the wheel of fortune would only revolve once in her favor. As for her disposition, I refer you to the sleek, gray cat that lies curled up in her lap, in the most luxurious of knots, blinking his eyes lazily at the setting sun on this mild May evening; to the dogs, who know her step and voice from all others about the premises, and to the parrot swinging in the cage just above her head, whose shrill and frequent utterance of, "Becky—you Becky Snowe—you Becky," betokens the best understanding between Becky and Poll. Whether, as you proceed with this story, you will pronounce my favorite Rebecca a between in character as well as in physique, remains to be discovered.

Sitting on the low, broad steps, which led down into the front yard I have already described so glowingly, was Miss Agnes Snowe, an undeniably handsome woman, according to certain ideas on the subject of female beauty.

She was tall and stately; carried herself with the air of a princess royal; looked as straight and as haughtily at you, with her cold gray eyes, as if she really were a princess of high degree, and you one of her humblest subjects just convicted of some flagrant act of disloyalty. Would give you the tips of her long, taper fingers,—if you were so presumptuous as to offer

to shake hands,—with a superb kindness that made you deeply sensible of her royal highness's condescension. Would inquire after the welfare of one's self and one's belongings, so queenishly, that one was involuntarily tempted to reply with an humble, "You are too good, miss." Would throw other girls into perfect frenzies of suppressed wrath, by telling them coolly they looked "quite nice," when they fancied they were looking superlatively "killing." Would annihilate any poor aspirant for the position of accepted lover, who had nothing but his virtues and good looks to recommend him, with a withering refusal, so coolly insolent that it generally had the effect of sending him away thanking the fortune which had made her say "no," instead of "yes."

Altogether she carried herself and her poverty so regally, that one hardly knew whether to laugh at her presumption, or pity her, in that she was not born to that high estate which she was so eminently fitted personally to adorn.

At the time treated of, our princess royal, pending the coming of her prince, was resting her august head upon her royal hand, gazing listlessly out over the fair expanse of Silver Lake. There was a curiously wistful look in her large gray eyes as she sat there, thinking deeply, and the haughtiness with which she could envelop herself, as with a veil, at a moment's notice, was not so perceptible, while there was no stranger eye upon her, no presumptuous mortal to be impressed or quelled by it.

Her physical gaze took in a quiet enough homely picture. The dying tints of the day, that was almost gone, were softly reflected in the clear depths of the little lake, whose smooth surface was undisturbed by a single ripple. A pair of stately white cranes stalked along the margin of the water, with awkward, mincing steps, dipping their long beaks into the lake in quest of an evening meal. A noisy, fussy flock of geese was hurrying rapidly barnwards, as if fearful of being be-

nighted. A group of sleek, spotted cows was standing patiently outside of the gate, meditatively chewing the cud, and ever and anon sending gentle-toned "lows" through the fence, in answer to the vociferous complainings of their imprisoned offspring, by way of exhorting them to quietness and patience.

But Miss Snowe's mental vision was reveling in scenes which, though probably of the earth, earthy, were certainly neither of the geese, goosy, nor of the cows, cowy.

I have said that, for the nonce, Miss Snowe had so far forgotten her regality as to have allowed a seemingly wistful look to creep into her eyes,—usually such haughty eyes. Of what was she thinking?

Doubting, perchance, whether this little span of life be really worth the worry, the hurry, the heart-burnings, the brain labor we expend upon it. Asking her woman soul if there be no better, no higher, no truer life than one long, unceasing petty struggle to keep up appearance; a struggle that lasts from the cradle to the grave. Or, had the gentle influences of that soft May evening stolen in upon a heart, prematurely old and hard, and happily suggested to her that

"It is not all of life to live,
Nor all of death to die"?

No, she was thinking of none of these things. She was thinking of the one only thing that could bring that wistful, almost soft look into her marble face, and that one thing was her own grinding poverty, and the wistfulness meant pity for Agnes Snowe.

Suddenly she raised her head from her supporting hand, and pointing to a light which had just flashed into existence in a window of a house on the opposite shore of the lake, she turned to her sister Rebecca, saying, in a voice of hardly suppressed interest, "At last." Then heaving a sigh, as one does at the expiration of a long term of suspense, she rose from her

seat upon the steps, and, passing into the house, was seen no more that evening.

In the olden time, when there were seers upon the face of the earth, gray-bearded, hoary-headed croakers, who could fix their prophetic eyes upon a cloudless sky and tell of elemental wars then brewing, or turning a contemplative gaze upon the unruffled brow of sleeping infancy, presage, with awful accuracy, a woeful career and tragic end for the smiling innocent, what elements of sorrow might not they have extracted from the quiet home-scene I have tried to paint you !

With the unerring vision of second-sight, the seer would have taken in my little sketch at a glance and have painted you a finished picture from the dimly-sketched outlines, with light and shadow so truthfully and so artistically portrayed that you would have had done with me and my story in half the time it has taken my poor plodding pen to travel thus far. But as (fortunately for all story-tellers and would-be story-tellers) the race of seers has long since gone to dust, and the gift of second-sight is among the things that were, I will still have an opportunity to tell my story after my own fashion, drawing my own conclusions from my own premises, and instead of a presto, change ! look-on-this-picture-and-then-on-that sort of way of doing business, I will have to drag your reluctant attention over the dusty highway of prosaic fact ; and if, forsooth, I do not presage storms until the skies are at least overcast, nor foretell that yonder smiling cherub will travel post from the baby-jumper to the gallows, do not blame me, in that I am no prophetic raven, but blame the enlightenment of the age in which you and I, reader, have been so unfortunate as to see the light, — a Gradgrindian sort of age, that places fact upon the loftiest pedestal, and laughs to scorn fancy and imagination, with their offspring, legend and superstition.

CHAPTER II.

"AT LAST."

THE words "at last" with which Miss Snowe concluded her reverie are explainable in this manner:

Although there were some half dozen estates bordering upon Silver Lake, the young ladies at Tanglewood could hardly be said to have any neighbors with whom they could associate. The most of the plantations within visiting distance of them were owned by wealthy planters, whose families spent the greater portion of the winter in New Orleans, and the greater portion of the summer at some watering-place, being at home only late in the fall and early in the spring, so it was only in the interim between the two flittings that the Tanglewood permanents saw anything of their migratory neighbors; and as Major Snowe's circumstances were not such as admitted of much traveling about for his daughters, there were many weary months of each year during which they saw no white faces out of their own immediate family circle. But things were about to undergo a change, and the light in the window across the lake, which had elicited that exclamation from Miss Snowe, was the first indication that the change had actually taken place.

Crossing the lake diagonally from Tanglewood, one landed in front of a noble plantation, bearing the local designation of Aland (water-land), a place which for many years past had been what is called a "quarter-place,"—that is, no proprietor had made his residence there since the death of the father of the present owner, an event which had occurred more than a dozen years previously. The present proprietor having just come of age, and been emancipated from all legal re-

traint, had made known his intention of locating permanently at Aland, in anticipation of which event extensive preparations had been making for some time past. The whole house, a large, roomy, ornate mansion, had been repainted and rejuvenated. The walls of the halls and stairways had been oaked, and the floor of the large entrance-hall tessellated in black and white. Every room had been refurnished without regard to expense,—or taste either, I regret to add.

The parlor shone resplendent in a gorgeous new carpet and curtains, *not* to match. Showy brocatelle sofas and chairs crowded the apartment, a clumsy marble-topped center-table gleamed white and bare in the center of the room, looking like a tombstone waiting for an epitaph. The low, broad mantel-shelf supported at either end the inevitable matched flower vases, while in the center stood a huge old-fashioned, fancy clock under a glass shade, which seemed made for no earthly purpose but to fill up that bare space on that bare mantel-shelf, for there it had stood from time immemorial, pointing in the most stupidly idiotic and aggravatingly persistent manner to twenty minutes of two o'clock.

Years had come and gone since that old clock had struck one, staggered onward forty minutes longer, given one faint, dying "tick," and ceased its life's work forever. For the heart of the old clock was broken by neglect and ill usage as many another heart has been broken. Bright eyes had grown dim and closed heavily on a weary world to open never more, brighter hopes had sprung, flourished, and withered; little childish feet that had tripped lightly over trouble and over wrong, had grown large, waxed old, and gone plodding soberly down life's shady hillside since that one solitary stroke had sent its faltering voice echoing through the house at Aland. And now, when everything else was regilding and repainting, the old clock alone remained unchanged, still pointing patiently to

twenty minutes of two, awaiting the coming of a bearded man, who had last stood in its presence a little rosy-cheeked boy, watching its hands with tear-dimmed eyes, eagerly anxious for the laggards to reach two; for he was in durance vile for some childish misdemeanor, and was to stay shut up in the parlor until the clock struck two; but the clock never did strike two, and if it had, the little culprit would never have heard it, for long before it had ticked its expiring tick the prisoner had found egress through an unguarded window. . But all that was long, long ago, and I am afraid I have grown garrulous on the subject of the old clock at Aland.

The grounds, too, had all been put in neat trim for "young master's" coming. Fresh gravel had been strewn upon the circular drive that curved around to the entrance-gate, and the Chinese privet that bordered the central walk trimmed up so as to admit a little more of the sunlight. The boat-house had received a new coating of whitewash, and the old sail-boat that had grown leaky from disuse was tightly calked and made seaworthy, the tattered sail patched and bleached, and everything else done that could be thought of, by a yard full of good-natured and affectionate slaves, whose simple hearts waxed glad at the tidings that "master" was coming to live at home.

The whole premises had been in apple-pie order for at least two weeks, and the self-constituted household cabinet were growing impatient on one side of the lake, and our three lonely demoiselles at Tanglewood were weary of wondering when they would come, for a permanent neighbor of almost any description would have been a Godsend, so how much more cause for rejoicing that a young and wealthy bachelor was to be located so near them!

At the moment when Miss Snowe had discovered the existence of a light in the parlor window at Aland, a dog-cart drew up in front of the large gate of that mansion, and from it sprang lightly two young men, a

smart, jauntily-dressed mulatto valet, and a sleek white-and-tan bloodhound.

The "at last" of the young lady on the one side of the lake was echoed almost simultaneously on the other side by the housekeeper at Aland, whose portly proportions and smiling face soon made their appearance in the open front door, as their owner hastened to give a hearty hand shake and a heartier welcome home to her boy that she'd "toted" many and many a time through that same door.

While the two travelers are refreshing themselves, preparatory to partaking of the inviting supper that old Dora has gotten ready for them, I will tell you all that it is necessary to tell by way of introduction to Mr. Otis Barrow, the owner of Aland.

As far as he was himself aware, he had but one relative in the world, and that relative was the young man who had accompanied him home to Aland for a few months' stay.

Aland, he knew, had belonged to his father before him; but whether by inheritance or by right of purchase was more than he had ever been informed, or had ever cared to inquire into. He only knew that it had been handed down to him entirely unencumbered with debt, well stocked with mules and fine cattle, well peopled with "hands," and yielding him a princely income. He had been so fortunate as to have had honest guardians. Upright and trustworthy friends of his father, who had sent him to school immediately after his father's death (his mother had died before he could remember), and had faithfully administered his affairs until his majority, which had come about but a few months before his coming to Aland, at which time they had handed over their accounts and had started the young man about the administration of his own affairs, loaded with much good, wholesome advice, and many sincere wishes for his success in life.

In person, Mr. Otis Barrow was by no means a striking-looking young man, and I am afraid if he had

not been the undoubted possessor of a very handsome fortune, he would have found it up-hill work winning a smile from beauty's fair lip. Rather below than above the medium height, heavily, but not clumsily, built, a round, honest face, in which was set a pair of small, light-gray eyes, keen and intelligent in expression. Sheepish eyes when women-folk were about. Kindly eyes when they shone upon those he liked. Harsh, cruel eyes when their depths were disturbed by hatred or anger. Add to this a thick suit of light-brown hair, slightly inclined to curl, and you have the physique of Mr. Otis Barrow.

He had one of the most malleable of dispositions, rather too much so in consideration of his sex. A disposition that under happy home influences would likely ripen into benevolence and charity to all mankind, but which, under adverse circumstances, was just as likely to harden its possessor into that cold, unjust, suspicious character which makes a man a curse to himself and to all with whom he comes in contact.

I have limned you no glowing picture of a hero,—but I have drawn Otis Barrow simply and truthfully as he was when he entered into ownership of Aland, and before he had entered into acquaintanceship with Agnes Snowe.

CHAPTER III.

TWO BREAKFAST TABLES.

ON the morning after Mr. Otis Barrow had arrived at Aland, he and Mr. Paul Winchester, the friend and cousin who had accompanied him home, were seated at a well-appointed breakfast-table, making such havoc with the delicacies piled thereon as can only be made by two young and very hungry men whose digestive organs are sans peur et sans reproche.

"Aunt Dora" stood at the side-table dispensing the fragrant coffee, whose aroma filled the small breakfast-room, and as she poured in the thick, yellow cream, or dropped in one more lump of sugar, she kept up a running fire of answers to the questions which flowed in one continuous stream from the lips of the young men at the table.

Although born at Aland, Otis had left it at so early an age that he was almost as entire a stranger in the neighborhood as was his cousin, Paul Winchester. Aunt Dora's face was the one familiar object that had greeted him on his return. She it was who had nursed him in infancy, who had had entire charge of him from the moment of his mother's death up to the hour of his departure for school. She it was who had watched so faithfully over his household interests during his long absence from home, and she it was who was now installed as housekeeper and general superintendent of the Aland domestic cabinet.

Otis had a great many questions to ask her about the neighborhood and the probable chances for social intercourse therein, for he had come to Aland with no intention of playing the recluse, but because, being of

a naturally domestic turn and having a keen eye to business, both inclination and duty seemed to dictate the course he had taken.

"And who lives in the old tumble-down concern, just opposite, Aunt Dora?" asked the young man, handing her his cup to be replenished.

"That's somethin' you'll find out soon 'nough, I'll warrant," answered old Dora, with a chuckle. "Them's the Snowe family what lives there; and that 'ole tumble-down concern,' as you calls it, kivers two of as purty likely gals as you'll find twixt here and Orleans."

"Pretty girls! That's promising, Paul, old fellow," exclaimed the master of the house. "Come, old lady, some more about the pretty girls."

"Well, you see," said Aunt Dora, smoothing down her apron and only too ready to enter upon her favorite pastime of story-telling, "Mis' Snowe she died purty much bout the time yo' po' blessed ma went to heavin, but 'stead of leavin' one po' little boy behind like yo' ma done, she lef' three little gals, as helpless a crowd, take 'em all in all, as ever I see, for old Mars' Snowe ain't very much better than a chile yet, least-ways so far as makin' money, or takin' keer of anything, goes. Well, he sont them gals off to boardin'-school, and thar they stayed until las' year, when they all comes troopin' back, 'cause Miss Agnes and Miss Becky had done larnt 'nuff, and Miss Julia she 'clared she wouldn't stay on thar all by herself. Me and Patience (thar ole mammy) is ve'y good friends, and she was a tellin' me how sorry she felt for 'em when they cum'd home. It seems as how they never knowed, until they got home, but what they was as rich as Cريس. Thar pa had always bought 'em plenty ov fine close, and paid thar bills reg'lar, and give 'em money when they axed for it, and they'd ben sont way from home when they war so leetle they couldn't remember nothin' 'bout how things looked, and when they cum'd home, a cole, rainy, drizzly fall day, and seed everythin' lookin' so poor and miserable, they tuk on mightily.

Miss Agnes she bust out cryin' when they got into thar own room, and sed she'd ruther die than spend the rest uv her life in that hole; and then Miss Jule—she's the young 'un—bust out cryin' too, and then Miss Becky—she's the middle 'un—bust out a laughin', and told them they was two little geese. And ever sence that blessed night she'se ben doin' the laughin' and helpin' and workin', and theyse ben doin' the frettin' and complainin'."

"Becky is the girl for me!" cried the two young men, as old Dora concluded her summary of the Snowe affairs.

"No, she ain't, nuther," was the dry rejoinder.

"Why not, Aunt Dora,—come?"

"'Cause she's a rale plain-lookin' gal, and the other two is the purty ones. Not but what she's got more sense in one uv her little fingers than the udder two has in they whole bodies." With which eulogium on her favorite, Aunt Dora disappeared within the pantry.

While they were being so freely discussed at Aland, the Misses Snowe were eating their own breakfast in blissful unconsciousness. Becky was seated behind the cups and saucers, for what with Agnes's haughty indifference and Julia's supreme laziness, the house-keeping had gradually come to be considered Becky's affair alone. And a notable little housekeeper she made, too. For although the delicious coffee at Aland was served in finest china, the aromatic steam that arose from the stone-china cups with which Becky was encircled was just as strong and just as fragrant, and the cream with which she diluted it was not one whit the less yellow or less rich than that which Aunt Dora dispensed from a silver jug. Her butter and her rolls were her especial boast; and when there was hardly an egg to be had for love or money, Becky always found means to induce her hens to be generous.

"A great little manager, and a real good girl, but a most villainous chess-player, sir,—villainous; loses her queen every time, sir, every time, and would lose it

twice over if I were to give her a chance," is what Major Snowe would say of Becky if asked his private opinion.

The breakfast hour at Tanglewood was never the most sociable of seasons, for the one good reason that it takes concert of action and unanimity of purpose to accomplish the desirable feat of making four or five people look exceedingly smiling and cheerful at a very early hour of the day, unless they are natural born cherubs, which the Snowes were not.

Miss Snowe considered it incompatible with the dignity of the station which she ought by rights to be maintaining to rise at the plebeian hour of six, and consequently did it with a very bad grace.

Miss Julia, who "hated" a very great many things in this world, "did hate" to have to hurry through with her dressing in the morning without having had half a chance to curl her hair, so she generally managed to come straggling in when the meal was half over, looking exceedingly cross and exceedingly dowdy.

Major Snowe not being equal to the exertion of talking and eating at the same time, pretty generally took his meals in dumb silence.

Becky alone, fresh from early rising and brightened by matutinal exercise, made a regular attempt to enliven the limp trio seated around the board. This morning, of course, the event of the day previous afforded a topic.

"Mr. Barrow has come, father."

"Well," was the monosyllabic reply vouchsafed between the ascent of Major Snowe's fork to his mouth and its descent again to his plate.

"Didn't you know him when he was a little boy, father?" inquired Agnes, graciously pleased to join in the conversation, as she had her own private reasons for introducing the Barrow subject.

"Yes." Gulp of coffee.

"Is he very handsome, father?" lisped Miss Julia, pulling out a curl from behind her ear.

"Humph!" was all her father vouchsafed in reply to this decidedly feminine interrogatory.

"I wouldn't make a goose of myself, Julia," snapped Miss Snowe,— "that is, if I could help myself. You know father has never laid eyes on Mr. Barrow since he was six years old, and now you want him to tell you whether or not he is *very hand-some*." Imitating Julia's drawl to perfection.

Julia placidly resumed the drinking of her tea, and a remonstrative, "Oh, Aggie," from Becky, was the sole comment on this amiable interlude.

"I suppose you will call on him, father?" pursued Miss Snowe, turning again to her parent.

"Perhaps."

"It is certainly your duty to do so," she continued, impressively.

"What a keen sense of duty you have suddenly developed!" sneered Julia, by way of a Roland for her sister's Oliver.

"How old is he, father?" asked Becky, anxious to prevent a reply on Agnes's part.

"Twenty-one."

"What a pity, Ag!—just exactly your age; he ought to be a little older, you know; just *ever* so little." With which innuendo Miss Julia pushed her chair back from the table and sauntered lazily out of the room.

Dignity (when she wasn't *too* mad) was Miss Snowe's rôle. And she tried to make up for the lack of it in character by an elaborate assumption of it in manner. As Julia was one of the "things" which she professed to consider vastly beneath her notice, she treated the most of her little childish pricks with silent contempt; hence that last Parthian dart was left to rankle uncommented upon.

CHAPTER IV.

MAN-TRAPS.

FOR two weeks after the installment of a resident master at Aland, things went on as usual on both sides of Silver Lake.

Young Barrow, on his side of the water, found ample occupation in riding around the place in the morning, visiting his quarters, and holding prolonged interviews with his overseer, as a necessary preliminary toward making himself thoroughly cognizant of his own business. After a late dinner he would order round the dog-cart, and he and his cousin would go bowling along for miles and miles over roads that were wonderfully good roads for a swampy country; or, if the day was favorable, the little sail-boat was almost sure to be seen gliding gently hither and thither, in an aimless, sans-souci fashion, managed by one of the two, while the other lay stretched out upon the seat, in lazy enjoyment of the gentle motion and a good cigar.

On the other side, the sight of this gleaming white sail was almost sure to awaken in Miss Snowe a lively sense of the duty her father owed to society in general and to this wealthy young bachelor in particular.

"I declare, father," she would say, "Mr. Barrow will think he has moved into the country of the 'Yahoos.' Here has he been two whole weeks, and not a soul been to welcome him back to his old home."

Major Snowe yielded to this continued dropping after awhile, and actually mustered the energy to call on his new neighbor.

"And remember, father," sly Agnes put in, as she performed the unusually filial office of adjusting his

neck-tie before he started off,—“remember that bare courtesy demands your inviting them over to tea for an early evening,—say some time this week.”

“What does Becky say to that?” asked Major Snowe, before compromising himself by a decided promise.

“Why, of course, father, it is her wish as much as mine,” was the equivocating reply. “You don’t suppose, do you, that I have any personal or private reason for wishing to be polite to these young men?”

“Oh, no, of course not, my dear,” said her father, with a faint twinkle in his eye.

“I only wish,” resumed the young lady, “to let them see that there *are* some people in the neighborhood who know what hospitality means.”

“Oh, yes, of course, my dear.” And the old gentleman descended the rickety stairs and entered his rickety boat, and had himself rowed across the lake to renew his acquaintance with the son of one of the best of his *auld lang syne* friends.

He found Mr. Barrow an ordinary-looking young man, plain of features, but frank and honest in manners,—manners characterized by that easy independence which a full purse is pretty apt to insure its possessor, be he who or what he may.

He found Mr. Winchester a tall, languid, fair young man, highly polished in manners and elegant in conversation. He presented rather a contrast in appearance to his cousin, who was decidedly “dumpy” and “bluff,” and his circumstances were equally at variance with those of the rich master of Aland, for Paul Winchester was only a struggling young barrister, who did not own one cent. But at heart the two cousins possessed many traits in common. They were both warm-hearted and affectionate by nature. They were both men of strictly honorable principles, with this difference, that, whereas with Otis Barrow to act honorably was more an instinct than a principle, with Paul Winchester it was instinct strengthened by careful

parental training and enforced by bright home example. They were both possessed of more than a modicum of temper; but whereas Paul had been taught to curb his passions until he had them under that complete control which is a *sine qua non* to the perfect gentleman, my poor Otis had never learned to do anything of the sort. He had had his own way ever since his father died; he had been bowed to and cringed to, as people will bow and cringe to other people who are rich, until he had come to think that he had something like a presumptive right to express his opinions with blunt candor, and to get into a passion and rage around generally when occasion called for it. Being naturally, however, as I have before told you, rather good-natured than otherwise, these displays were not of such very frequent occurrence.

Major Snowe enjoyed his visit rather more than he had anticipated; so, when he got up to go home, he baited his daughter's man-trap with suavity and empressment.

"So now, my lads, remember, you are to take tea with us on Thursday; we can promise you nothing very gay, for I am but an old fossil myself, and my three lassies, poor things, are plain country girls, whose experience of the gay world you have just quitted is so limited that they won't even be able to talk to you about it."

His invitation to tea was accepted with alacrity; his slighting mention of himself as an "old fossil" was politely deprecated, his unflattering description of his "poor lassies" negatived stoutly, and himself bowed into his boat by Messrs. Barrow and Winchester, who returned to the house in that state of elation consequent upon something having happened in a dull country house, and the still brighter prospect of the something that was to happen on Thursday evening.

When Major Snowe reached home and informed his daughters that on Thursday Aland and Tanglewood were to break bread together, in token of amity and

good will for all time to come, there was quite a flutter of agitation in three fair bosoms, while three distinct trains of thought went trooping through three young heads.

Thought Agnes: "What *shall* I wear? I am determined to fascinate this Cræsus. It looks as if Providence had sent him right into this God-forsaken region to lift me from this hateful, hateful life of poverty and deprivation. I wonder if he is fearfully un-presentable? It is evident father doesn't think much of his looks. I don't care. If he was a hunchback and a cripple; if he was blind in one eye and squinted in the other; if he was a brute in temper, and hadn't an ounce of brain, I'd marry him,—marry him for his gold! gold! gold!" And all this without one tremor of the full red lip, or slightest shrinking of the shapely form, in revolt at the unwomanly decision that was soon to be acted up to, in cold blood, by a young girl whose youth and comely face were sadly out of keeping with her old and calculating soul.

Thought Becky: "What on earth have *I* got fit to receive two strange men in?" I beg you not to think my Becky was one of those anomalous creatures, a female who did not care for dress. "But, then, what difference does it make what I put on? Ag will look so handsome and make herself so fascinating, as she always does to young men, that if I was to put on a Lowell's dress and a gunny-sack for an apron they wouldn't even know I was in the room. What on earth shall I have for supper? Oh, I do wish the strawberries would be so good as to ripen by Thursday! There are almost enough ripe right now. I must tell everybody to let them alone."

Thought Julia: "I know just as well as if Aggie had come out and said so, that she has made up her mind to catch Mr. Barrow. How does she know, though, that he's catchable? How does she know that he isn't already engaged to be married? But, then, he's too young for that to be very probable.

Why, he just isn't younger than Aggie's self. How does she know what style he prefers?" And here Miss Julia gave the mental preference to languishing eyes over haughty eyes; to clinging, drooping females over commanding, scornful beauties, etc. The result of her cogitations was the conclusion that the field was open to competitors yet awhile, and that it behooved her to be alert and—to have her blue organdie pressed out.

And now, my dear young lady readers, *please* don't lay my book down in disgust, and declare that "you never heard of such sickening creatures in your life, that they are not deserving the name of women, that they are bad, bold manœuvrers, who deserve the scorn and contempt of all true women and the rest of mankind." I know *you* never saw such creatures, my dears, for they exist only in the brains of story-tellers (and big story-tellers at that), and I know they *ought* to writhe under your well-merited contempt, my dear Miss Particularity Prudence; and as soon as that one among you who can prove herself entirely free from like weakness or foible shall cast a stone at them, I will give them orders to writhe in the most becoming fashion.

CHAPTER V.

THE TRAP IS SPRUNG.

THURSDAY evening found Miss Snowe in such an unpromising frame of mind that any one, unacquainted with the resources of her sex, would have augured ill for the possibility of her making a favorable impression upon the Coming Man.

After their early dinner, she and Miss Julia Snowe had retired to the bedroom they occupied in common to decide upon the great McFlimsey question.

As prudent Julia had had the blue organdie pressed and fluted the day before, she could afford to throw herself upon the bed by way of resting (!) and insuring the proper amount of carnation to her lips and brightness to her eyes when the important hour should come. So there she lay, with one dimpled hand under her head, watching her sister's movements, with a little malicious smile at the evident perplexity of spirit under which that young lady was laboring.

Agnes had been standing holding the doors of her armoire open with both hands, looking into its sparsely-filled compartments with evident disgust. She was halting between the respective merits of a gray grenadine, with blue trimmings, that had a coffee stain on one width, and a bright new buff cambric, that was "perfectly hideous, and only intended for a mulatto complexion." Soiled gentility carried the day, and the grenadine was jerked down from its peg as if Miss Snowe owed it a personal grudge instead of a debt of gratitude, for having retained its good looks so long.

"This thing of being as poor as a church mouse, yet having to dress as a lady, is rather exhausting to one's powers of invention," she exclaimed, pettishly, as she

swung the doors of her unoffending armoire to with a bang.

"Gently, ma belle, or you'll get that fair brow of yours into such a pucker that strangers might set you down for a cross old maid instead of a sweet sugar lump of a lassie as you are," laughed Julia, saucily.

She was in a very good humor this evening, for the blue organdie was so becoming, and the certainty of looking well has such a humanizing effect upon a woman that she can afford to smile sweetly over the direst misfortunes—of another.

A sniff of disdain was Miss Snowe's only retort.

"I say, Aggie," continued her younger sister, "if you don't catch this goldfish, I shall certainly try to do so myself. Just imagine the felicity of being mistress of Aland, and having as many dresses as one wants, all guiltless of coffee stains, and going to the Springs in summer and New Orleans in winter, and being waited on at every turn, and being able to lie in bed up to any unearthly hour you please in the morning;—oh, heavenly!" And at this pictured acme of human felicity, Miss Julia Snowe clasped her little hands in ecstasy.

Agnes took no note of her. Her calm, gray eyes had wandered to the open window, and were gazing into space. She was pondering.

What?

Was she making a mental inventory of the human blessings categorically suggested by Julia, and adding them up to see if the sum total brought perfect happiness? Was there entering into that cold young heart of hers some vague suspicion that a little love, a little human sympathy, must be added unto all these things before genuine happiness could be secured? Was the great coming event casting its shadow before, and bidding her pause and think well before taking the irrevocable leap? No.

She was wondering if there was any way on earth of hiding that coffee stain on the side width of her

dress, and she had solved the mighty problem by deciding to wear a tiny little Swiss apology for an apron, all ruffles and blue bows, which, besides, she added mentally, "has a smack of the domestic about it which *may* please him, however abhorrent it is to me."

So, while Becky, "on hospitable thoughts intent," was busy in the back gallery helping wash the *real* China tea-set and the cut-glass goblets, which were always saved for company, and printing the golden pat of butter until every cut in the hollow wooden pineapple was faithfully reproduced on the smooth, yielding surface, and picking the motes from the strawberries, and running out into the kitchen every now and then to see if "her rolls were rising," and her flannel cakes were not souring, the beauties of Tanglewood were arraying their fair persons with dainty precision, and arranging their two heads of hair in the most bewilderingly becoming fashion, and sticking bows here and flowers there, producing by their artistic touches such a tout-ensemble that Messrs. Winchester and Barrow must needs be something firmer and harder than two gay, light-hearted young men, not to surrender at first sight.

The sun was just going down in a perfect blaze of golden glory as the pretty sail-boat from Aland, containing the above-mentioned young gentlemen, glided with gentle grace close up to the shore in front of Tanglewood, and our two young men sprang lightly ashore, gave one glance at their polished boots to see that they had sustained no injury in the leap, gave each a downward pull to their white vests, raised their hats, and gave a furtive dig in the dark by way of improving the looks of their heads, and then marched boldly forward, utterly unconscious that four bright eyes were peeping at them slyly from the Cyclopean window in the roof.

"Oh, how handsome!" whispered Julia, pinching Agnes on the arm.

"Yes, but of *course*," said Agnes, in the tone of a

person suffering under a great and unmerited personal wrong, "*that* one is Mr. Winchester."

Then they left the window, took each one more searching glance into the mirror, and glided gracefully down-stairs to the work of destruction.

Now, as not one of these three ~~young~~ ladies, or the two young men, were geniuses of any description, as not one of them were familiar with either Hebrew or Sanscrit, as they went neither to the Nile nor the Niger for subjects for social chat, I would really be ashamed to write down verbatim the commonplaces that passed between these five commonplaces. Three of the party got along very elegantly and gracefully: these three were Miss Snowe, Miss Julia, and Mr. Winchester; but poor Mr. Barrow, who had never spoken half a dozen words to a young and pretty woman in his whole life, suddenly found himself minus a tongue or an idea, and wondering, pettishly, "where in the devil Paul had picked up so much small talk." He got along a little better with Becky, but it was only a few moments before tea was announced that she made her appearance. I think it was because poor Becky looked so very red in the face, and so flurried and worried (her rolls were a failure, reader!), and seemed altogether to be pretty much of his own mind about the vanity of all things here below, that he felt drawn toward her, seeing which, Miss Agnes Snowe felt drawn toward him, and exerted herself for his special and private entertainment with the most charming assiduity and triumphant success.

The absence of the rolls that had been burnt in the baking was not noticed in the presence of the other delicacies that graced Becky's table, and she had the pleasure of seeing their visitors enjoy her viands like men, while the pretty creatures opposite them nibbled them like mice.

The evening, like all other evenings, came to an end, and the sail-boat from Aland pushed out from the Tanglewood landing, bearing with it two young men

as desperately and hopelessly in love as two poor misguided young wretches ever were.

As it glided out of sight, Miss Snowe turned from the veranda with a slight shiver of disgust, murmuring, audibly, "A golden calf;" adding, inaudibly, "why *couldn't* the other one have held the purse?"

As it glided out of hearing, the two young men uttered the single comment,—

"She is glorious!"

She—and there were three of them!

"Miss Julia would be a beauty if she had no sister Agnes," said Mr. Barrow.

"Too much on the Lydia Languish order," answered Paul. "Give me a light, Ote." And they paused in their criticisms long enough to light two cigars.

"I say, Paul," resumed Mr. Barrow, after a few moments spent in getting his cigar well under way, "I expect Miss Becky is a mighty good girl."

"Who questions Miss Rebecca Snowe's excellence?" asked Paul, sententiously.

"She's one of the domestic sort, you know," said Otis.

"Vide Aunt Dora," laughed Paul.

"But I say, Paul, don't you think it's a pity she's so deuced plain?"

"Not to put too fine a point on it," replied Mr. Winchester, laughingly, "Miss Rebecca Snowe is certainly not a beautiful woman."

My poor Becky! They say "virtue is its own reward." I hope you will find it so, for that is the only reward you are likely to receive in a world where men are so unreasonable as to object to the crimson flush that is unavoidable so long as things have to be cooked over the fire, or who are ready to quarrel with a woman because, forsooth, she doesn't look as serenely smiling and coolly calm, after a long day of petty housekeeping trials, as if she had just emerged from a bower of roses where she had nothing to do but sip nectar and smile on languishing lovers.

CHAPTER VI.

NOTHING NEW.

THINGS progressed between the two houses of Aland and Tanglewood just as might have been expected from the result of the first visit, only the "Golden Calf," reversing the position of his theological ancestor, was the worshiper instead of the worshiped.

The misfortune of it was, that Mr. Barrow and his cousin Paul had both been unwise enough to fall in love with the same lady, a fact of which both were fully aware, as was indicated by a conversation which took place between them one evening, about two months after their first visit to their fair neighbors.

Mr. Winchester had just announced to Mr. Barrow that he considered his holiday had been rather a long one, and he should start for his Northern home and business some time during the next week. They were sitting on the veranda at Aland smoking, and Mr. Barrow puffed away in silence for a few moments, without replying; then he spoke as if he had been making up his mind to something.

"You are not going away without speaking out to her, Paul?"

"Speaking out to whom?" asked Paul, deceitfully.

"To Miss Snowe," replied the master of Aland, flinging his half-smoked cigar impatiently over the banisters. "Curse it, Paul," he continued, excitedly, "don't let us try to make fools of each other any longer. You know that I love her, and I know that you love her; but I'll be d—d if I can tell whether or not she cares a straw for either one of us. Sometimes I feel certain she cares more than a little for you; then, when I've made

up my mind to that, and have begun to turn my attentions toward Rebecca the domestic, my Lady Agnes all of a sudden turns ice to you, and warm, rosy wine to me, until my head and heart are full of her again, and I turn from the idea of ever courting any other woman with loathing. So there's but one sensible way for us to settle it, old fellow. We might fall out and go through the motion of cutting each other's throats, by way of satisfying our spite, but I've no notion of falling out with the best friend I have on the earth for any woman living. I love Agnes Snowe. I don't pretend to say I don't, and I want her for my wife. Gad, though, wouldn't she look like a queen dressed in silks and diamonds? So do you love her, and so do you want her for a wife, and, for all I know to the contrary, your chances of getting 'yes' for answer are forty times as good as mine, so we'll row over there to-morrow, Paul, my boy, and I'll talk to Miss Julia, while you ask Agnes Snowe if she will consent to become Mrs. Winchester. If she says 'yes,' your face will tell me quick enough; if she says 'no,' come and lay your hand upon my shoulder, which will mean, 'Now, old boy, go and try your luck.' I'll promise not to be cross, Paul, if you're the lucky one, and you must promise the same by me."

"That's all fair enough," said Paul, as Mr. Barrow concluded this business-like settlement of their love difficulty; "and you may rest assured, Otis, that whatever the result may be you and I are still friends."

They clasped hands on this and dropped the subject for that night.

Prosaic creatures! What a thrilling chapter they might have given me material for if they had only gotten up some sort of tragic excitement about it, instead of bringing their cool, nineteenth-century brains to bear upon the subject!

So to Tanglewood our two unheroic heroes went the evening following the conversation just related, determined to put an end to all suspense. Luckily for their

schemes, they found Becky pinned down to the chess-table, opposite her father, who sat there looking as complacent as a fat old spider who had just succeeded in webbing a poor struggling fly.

As the evening was charming, Mr. Winchester proposed a stroll to Miss Snowe and Miss Julia, a proposition which they acceded to with alacrity. As per contract, Mr. Barrow appointed himself Miss Julia's cavalier, and marched off with her so briskly and eagerly that they were soon far in advance of the more stately couple in the rear. This looked so much like design, and Mr. Barrow seemed making such unusual exertions to appear particularly interested in Miss Julia's platitudes, that Miss Snowe brought her pearly teeth together with a click that boded ill for any wild dreams in which poor Julia might be indulging.

Paul Winchester had his chance, and he made the best of it. Without any of that ridiculous hemming and hawing, and fumbling of hats, and twisting of handkerchiefs which converts the most sensible of men into grinning idiots during the throes of proposal, he told his love quietly and earnestly, telling her everything relating to his financial affairs manfully and honestly. He told her that he had nothing but his practice to depend upon, and as he had been but recently admitted to the bar, it might be years before he could promise to support her in any better style than that in which she was then living. But, if she loved him, he hoped that would not weigh too heavily against him. He should always be able to make her perfectly comfortable, but one so fair as she had a right to demand more than bare comfort, and if God spared his life long enough she should have more as his wife.

Agnes listened to him very patiently. She was sorry when he stopped speaking. She loved this man as dearly as she could love anything, and she loved the sound of his voice. Above all things was it pleasant to hear that voice pouring out protestations of love for herself. But he had dwelt too honestly upon

his poverty. If her heart had been breaking for love of him she would not have married him, poor as he was, and it might be years before his fortunes changed. So, although the hand resting upon his arm trembled with emotion so real and strong that it astonished herself, she thanked him with a cool, steady voice for the honor done her, and regretted that she had nothing more than friendship to repay him with, etc.

Then they quickened their steps until they came up with Mr. Barrow and Julia, who were resting on a log, and Mr. Winchester, laying his hand heavily upon his cousin's shoulder, said, quietly, "Come, Otis, we are keeping the ladies out too late."

Otis started violently as that hand was laid upon his shoulder, for he had hardly dared hope for this turn of affairs, and now that his chance had come to him he felt much more like breaking into a fleet run in the opposite direction than offering Miss Snowe his arm. But she, knowing that it would be extremely awkward to walk back with Mr. Winchester after what had passed between them, settled the difficulty by a skillful manœuvre which placed Julia next Mr. Winchester and herself and Mr. Barrow together.

He managed to mumble out a proposal before they were half-way to the house, but he did it so ungracefully, and got so red in the face, and made such a goose of himself generally, that Miss Snowe had to keep her mind's eye fixed steadily upon the golden fortune he was offering her to enable her to hide her supreme disgust. But she did hide it admirably, for after the poor, bungling fellow had succeeded in conveying to her distinctly his desire to make her Mrs. Barrow, she looked calmly, nay, even sweetly, into his face, and promised him to be his wife and to love him and cherish him, and all that sort of thing, till death them did part. So Otis Barrow was made happy; so Agnes Snowe was made rich.

We are apt to associate all coldness, and selfishness, and heartlessness with accumulated years, when a

thorough knowledge of life as it is has chilled the warm current of youthful affection; when experience of men has made us look upon unselfishness as a species of verdancy, and when disappointment heaped upon disappointment has turned the milk of human kindness into bitterest gall; yet here was a creature young and fair—so fair and so young—whose soul was as selfish, whose brain was as calculating, whose heart was as hardened as a world-worn cynic of seventy winters.

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT EVERYBODY THOUGHT.

NOTWITHSTANDING his cousin's urgent entreaties to the contrary, Mr. Winchester persisted in leaving Aland at the time he had settled upon.

Mr. Barrow was both astonished and relieved to see him bear his disappointment about Agnes so quietly. He felt sure that Paul had never really loved her, for he knew *he* could not have been rejected by her and yet have shown so little regret as did Paul.

The truth was, Mr. Winchester had made a discovery that very much assisted him to bear up under his disappointment. Miss Snowe herself, in fact, had kindly applied the healing lotion.

Without having any more vanity than usually falls to the lot of handsome men, Mr. Winchester was firmly convinced that although Agnes Snowe had said "no" to him and "yes" to his cousin, she really cared more for him, the rejected, than she did for her fiancé. He had been convinced of this by a thousand and one little things almost too slight to be described. He had watched her face well when in conversation with his cousin, and never once had he seen aught in those

cold gray eyes of hers but polite and forced attention. He had watched her acceptance of the beautiful bouquets that poor Otis had caused the Aland gardener to construct for her pleasure, and had seen her lay them carelessly upon a window-sill or table to die of neglect, while the solitary spray of mignonette or jasmine, which he had sometimes taken as a votive offering, was sure to find its way into her hair, or breastpin, or belt. He knew that he could bring a look of softer meaning and deeper interest into those firm eyes with his lightest word than poor Otis's most ardent protestations would ever be rewarded with. He had seen a soft pink womanly flush mount into her cheek at his compliments, when she would turn off an attempt at worded homage from her future husband with a little derisive laugh.

Therefore, when with all these mental lights shining upon the subject, she said "no" to him and "yes" to Mr. Barrow, Mr. Winchester was forced to the conclusion that Miss Snowe was a mercenary young woman, who preferred "a stalled ox and hatred therewith to a dinner of herbs where love was." Seeing which, Mr. Winchester lost respect for Miss Snowe, losing which, Mr. Winchester's love fell to zero; for he held to the old-fashioned theory that love, to be genuine and to last, must be founded upon respect. The consequence of all which was that, so far from feeling resentful toward his cousin, or envying him, his heart was filled with the profoundest pity, some of which found unpremeditated expression as he bade Mr. Barrow good-by. He held both his cousin's hands in his, and looked down into the plain, honest face of the master of Aland with a look of such solemn import that Mr. Barrow winced perceptibly under it.

"Oh, I say, Paul, why in the devil are you looking at me as if I was to be hung to-morrow, and you had come to receive my dying confession?"

Mr. Winchester laughed. "Excuse me, Otis, I was

utterly unconscious of looking so lugubrious. Good-by ! God bless you, and——”

“And what?”

“And make you as happy as you expect to be and as you richly deserve to be.”

“Thank you, Paul. But remember, you promise to be best man.”

“I have promised, and I will be here. You’ll write to me in the mean while, and I shall know by your letters whether your Dulcinea is treating you like a mouse or like a man during the trying period of courtship.”

With which they parted.

On the memorable evening when Mr. Barrow had made his intentions known, he had asked Agnes if he should speak to her father when they returned to the house. Miss Snowe inaugurated a new order of things. She simply told him that she preferred telling her father herself, and then coolly requested him to let that be his last visit until that day week. Her object in making this request was to preclude the possibility of another meeting with Mr. Winchester. She knew that the day fixed for his departure was only four days off. Mr. Barrow consented reluctantly, and was seen no more during the specified time.

Miss Snowe’s method of telling her father was characteristic in the extreme. It was a point of religion with her never to be in a hurry about anything. It was her turn at the chess-table. She played the regulation number of games—three—with her usual placid indifference, and got beaten with her usual equanimity, and, when the last game was finished, she proceeded to place the chessmen back in the box with the most methodical precision. “Father,” she began, in a cold, business-like voice, fitting the queen in spoon-fashion to the king as she spoke, “I have made up my mind to marry Mr. Barrow.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed her father. “I rather thought from what I had observed that you preferred the other young man.”

"So I do, infinitely," replied the young lady, laying a pawn heels downward on the queen's back.

"Then why not marry *him*, my child?" asked her father, who, whatever else he was, certainly was not mercenary.

"Because, father, he is as poor as I am, and it would be the act of a simpleton, instead of a sensible woman, to marry without some guarantee that she was bettering her condition."

Major Snowe bowed to the superior wisdom of his daughter, and began mumbling some commonplace hopes about her being happy with the man of her choice and about love frequently following upon the heels of respect, etc., in which he was brought to a sudden stand-still by the filial request that "he wouldn't talk any more nonsense."

"You talk, father, as if I was going to marry him because I loved him. When I do not, and you know I do not, and he knows I do not. When, in fact, I hate him,—that is, I don't now, but I will when the thing is irrevocable."

"Why, then, in the name of Heaven, marry him, girl?" asked her father, uttering a feeble protest against such worldliness.

"Because," returned Agnes, springing vehemently to her feet, in one grand burst of nature, "because I am poor and he is rich. Because, although I hate him abundantly, I hate this poverty-stricken existence more. Because I love the beautiful things of this world, and he alone offers me the means of procuring them. That is why I marry him, and I think it absolute nonsense for any one who knows him and knows me to talk any sentimental twaddle about hearts and darts, and loves and doves."

Thus snubbed, the vanquished champion of the old-fashioned notions about married life sat silent, chewing the cud of solemn meditation, and conscious of a dim sort of pity for the poor, rich young man who was soon to deprive him of this domestic treasure.

Becky received the information of her sister's engagement with very little show of gladness. She, too, had been observant for the last few months. She had observed the same things and come to the same conclusion that Paul Winchester had. She believed that Agnes loved the man she had rejected, and cared not a rush for the man she had accepted.

Now, in the bottom of Rebecca Snowe's warm, true heart she loathed everything that savored of the insincere or hypocritical. She believed that Agnes was doing violence to her real feelings in this marriage, and Becky would not perjure her honest lips by offering congratulations when she felt like uttering remonstrances. But she knew the one would be as useless as the other was vain; so she contented herself with uttering a sincere *hope* that her sister would be happy.

Julia received the announcement with a perfect burst of girlish delight. She sniffed a wedding afar, and her feminine soul burned for the action. A wedding meant new dresses, and flowers, and light, and life, and people, and partners, and, probably, "catches," and then, maybe, when Agnes was married, and had everything on earth she wanted, she might grow amiable (as people *do*, you know, when they have everything they want), and she might take her traveling, or let her stay at Aland, or do something or other for her. At any rate, Agnes was a personage to be treated with marked respect from this time out.

The next person to be told was Aunt Patience, who had stood them in place of mother ever since they were all three left little, crying, troublesome orphans. She dismissed the subject with a short but cutting sarcasm. She raised her withered old face until she could look Agnes straight in the eye,—

"You'se a purty lookin' specimen to be thinkin' of marryin', an' you couldn' darn a hole in a sock nor make a shirt, not ef your life 'pended on it."

Agnes gave an uneasy, little laugh at this summary of her disqualifications for the estate matrimonial, and

wondered, with an inward shudder, if *he* would expect her to do such horrid things.

On his side, Mr. Barrow had but one human being to impart the mighty news to. That was to old Dora, his whilom nurse and present housekeeper. He told it with the air of a man who fully expected to be congratulated upon having achieved something great and glorious. He was somewhat disappointed when Aunt Dora's sole reply to his rhapsody was a monosyllabic "Humph!"

"Come, old lady, what are you humphing at?"

"Nothing, Mars' Otis, savin' 'taint no news to me."

"Isn't news! why, it is to me."

"Maybe so," replied old Dora, stolidly; "but I knowed it from the fus' moment you put your foot into de boat to go to Tanglewood, for I never yit seed a purty gal set out to fool a young man but what she 'ceeded, ef he'd only keep goin' in sight of her purty face often 'nuff."

"Come, Aunt Dora, you're cross because you think somebody's coming to take your place at the head of things."

Aunt Dora answered this with a disdainful toss of her head that threatened the overthrow of her turban. "Take *my* place! Lord love your soul, my chile, ef you think Miss Agnis Snowe can ever fill dis nigger's place! Now, ef 'twas Miss Becker, I might be skeered; but as 'tis, Dora Dilson 'specks to have her hands fuller'n ever when Mrs. Agnis Barrow steps 'cross dis thrish-old!"

Mr. Barrow laughed heartily at this diatribe, and told the old woman that she was a bigoted old goose, and forewarned her that she'd better not come any of her grandiloquence over Mrs. Barrow when she did arrive.

Dora hoped she would always remember what was due to her master's wife and the mistress of Aland, and closed her mouth forever on the subject, leaving her young master in undisturbed enjoyment of his Fool's Paradise.

CHAPTER VIII.

ACTUALLY MARRIED.

THE wedding-day was fixed for the beginning of February.

Julia's first disappointment came to her in the announcement that it was to be strictly private.

*Private weddings were among the many things she "did hate." She would much rather attend a funeral, for there everybody was expected to look at each other like so many owls, and did it accordingly ; but at private weddings people were expected to feel gay, or, at least, to act gayly, without the slightest provocation to hilarity ; and she could no more do it than she could dance the round dances in a graveyard on a tombstone, with a wet blanket wrapped round her for a ball dress.

But Agnes was inexorable. She had the good taste not to desire to make the contrast between her poverty as Miss SNOWE and her coming grandeur as Mrs. Barrow brought too startlingly before the eyes of the world by inviting them to witness her transition from the one to the other.

There was to be no one invited but her own immediate family, Mr. Winchester, and the family physician, Dr. Lombard, an individual whom, by the way, I have been entirely too tardy about introducing. Wait until the wedding is over, doctor, and I will hand you down to posterity in a chapter all to yourself.

Time rolled on apace and brought the fateful evening.

Becky had made the bride-cake herself, and more than one tear had rolled furtively off the end of her nose and dropped into the spongy batter, for she had made it with a heavy heart. She hated this worldly,

loveless marriage ; and the nearer the time approached for its consummation, the worse she hated it. She had fully made up her mind to utter one honest protest against it before the irrevocable words were spoken ; but Agnes had been acting very strangely all day long. She had locked her bedroom door immediately after breakfast, and had refused to admit any one on any pretext whatever. She wanted to be alone, she said, and she wished they would leave her in peace. At dinner-time Becky carried a cup of coffee up to her door with her own hands, and pleaded for admittance with sweet sisterly earnestness.

“ Aggie dear, let me come in and sit with you awhile ; I have something on my mind that I *must* say to you before eight o'clock comes. You'll be leaving us so soon, Aggie,—don't be cross with me to-night.”

Agnes opened the door wide enough to reach out her hand for the coffee. Her face was as colorless as marble. “ Thank you, Becky ; but I can't talk with any one just now.” Then she closed the door in her sister's face and locked it.

Becky sat down on a trunk in the hall and indulged in a good old-fashioned cry. Then she got up, wiped her eyes, and went down-stairs to see if she could find something more to do. She was restless and miserable, and idleness only made her more so.

The ceremony was to be performed at eight. At seven o'clock she received a message from Agnes requesting her presence. She had already completed her own simple toilet, and was assisting Julia, when the bride's message was brought to her. When she entered the bedroom, that had been the sole witness that day of a fierce struggle within the bosom of Agnes Snowe, Becky paused and uttered an involuntary tribute of admiration to her sister's surpassing loveliness. “ Oh, Aggie, you are superb !”

“ Thank you,” said Miss Snowe, coolly. “ I've sent for you to get you to arrange my wreath and veil, Becky,—that is the only part of my toilet I find it im-

possible to accomplish by myself; and then, while you are fixing them, you can tell me what it is you *must* say before eight o'clock." Then she seated herself in the arm-chair, before her mirror, carefully arranging the voluminous folds of her bridal dress as she did so, and having settled herself to her satisfaction, she began leisurely stretching her white gloves.

Becky took the wreath out of its box, and lifted the soft fleecy veil from its bed, and shook its folds out slowly and deliberately. She gave a little shiver as she did so, which was perceived by Agnes, who was furtively watching her in the glass.

"It isn't a shroud, it's a wedding veil, Becky," she called out, recklessly.

"Oh, Agnes, for mercy's sake!" And Becky shivered again in earnest. Then she came behind her sister's chair and laid her hand caressingly upon the haughty head. Agnes neither acknowledged nor resented the sisterly act, but sat as motionless as a statue.

Then Becky spoke out. Her voice trembled a little when she first began, but grew stronger and firmer as her feelings got the better of her timidity, until it filled the little room with solemn, earnest eloquence:

"Agnes dear," she said, "I've been watching you closely ever since you engaged yourself to Mr. Barrow, and I know that you do not love him. A woman does not grow light-hearted and gay when a storm suddenly arises to prevent her lover from coming to her, if she is his lover as well. A woman does not treat flowery offerings from the hand of him she really loves as you treat poor Mr. Barrow's beautiful bouquets. A woman does not refuse to grant one token of affection, or even interest, before marriage, on the prudish score of impropriety, when she really cares for a man, nor does she sit and look at her engagement ring, and shiver as it gleams cold and bright in the moonlight, and turn the glittering stone into the palm of her hand, as I've seen you do, Aggie. You don't love him, Agnes, and you are marrying him for his money. It will bring

you harm, my sister, and not good. I know you well enough to feel sure that you will not be a wise wife and try to soften down all the little angularities that will be sure to make themselves felt in your married life. It is not too late, Aggie,—send for him as soon as he gets here, and tell him you do not love him and will not do him the cruel injustice of marrying him for his gold. We are poor, Aggie, I know, very, very poor,—but you are young and so beautiful, why can you not wait a little while? I'll pinch and save in every imaginable way, Aggie; and let you go traveling until you see somebody you do love and can marry, if you will only promise not to bring this great unhappiness upon us all, and upon that poor young man. Oh, Aggie, you're going to make him such a bad wife! I know you are. And your home will be so wretched. All your money will only serve to gild its wretchedness. Let me go to him, sister dear, if you don't like to tell him all this. I'll tell it to him honestly, but kindly, and after the first smart is over, he will thank you for your honesty, and will respect you all the more. Say 'yes,' Aggie, won't you, dear? Say it before it is too late."

She paused for her sister's answer.

Miss Snowe had been all this time deliberately fastening the button in her right-hand glove. She looked calmly up into Becky's excited face as she replied, coldly, "My dear sister, I have no intention whatever of making a sentimental simpleton of myself at the eleventh hour, so you will oblige me by adjusting my veil and wreath. Don't do it, though, if you have any religious scruples about adorning me for this unrighteous marriage. I'll send for Jule if you have: I don't think she is afflicted with scruples of any description whatever."

Becky seized the veil without another word, and arranged it in graceful folds around the queenly form. Then she placed the wreath upon the braids of glossy brown hair, but, as she did so, a large pellucid tear

dropped from her downcast eyes right into the heart of a bridal rose, and glistened there, a last silent protest against this unholy compact. Then she kissed her sister in silence and left the room, promising to return when the bridegroom should have arrived.

Left to herself, Agnes Snowe rose slowly from her chair, and, with hands clasped before her, began pacing restlessly to and fro the whole length of the apartment. She looked more like a tragedy queen, so stately and stern and cold, than a young girl awaiting the coming of her bridegroom.

At last her troubled thoughts found utterance in audible murmurs.

"Oh, Paul! Paul! my love, my heart's idol, will you despise me utterly? Will you go your way through life believing me entirely soulless, utterly incapable of loving anything, when at this moment my wretched heart is so full of burning, passionate love for you that I am almost strong enough to give up my promised grandeur and go with you to share your poverty for the sake of your blessed love? Oh, my love, my love! come to me; one word of encouragement from you and I will fly from this union, yea, even if it should break *his* heart."

She paused in front of a window that commanded the boat landing. The moon was shining in a cloudless sky, rendering everything out-of-doors as bright as day. As she pressed her face against the cold glass, she saw the two young men coming up the little path to the house,—her husband that was to be, and by his side the tall, graceful figure of Paul Winchester.

An audible moan trembled over the white lips of the unhappy girl. As she shrunk from the window she confronted Becky, who had entered noiselessly to announce that they were coming.

"Becky," said Agnes, hurriedly, "I want to speak with Mr. Winchester. I *must* speak with him," she added, vehemently; "go and fix it somehow, so that I can see him alone for five minutes."

Becky, who had hoped against hope that something might yet occur to stop the marriage, flew to arrange the interview between Mr. Winchester and her sister, fondly believing that Agnes was going to request that gentleman to inform his cousin for her of her suddenly-conceived resolution not to marry him.

Before Mr. Barrow well knew where he was, he found himself shut up like a Jack-in-a-box by the energetic Miss Rebecca, who mumbled a few incoherent words of pretended explanation, as she closed the door upon him, and bustled away to parts unknown.

Mr. Winchester found himself invited in the same incoherent fashion into a little room called by courtesy Major Snowe's study. Hardly had the door closed upon Becky's retreating form before it opened again to give admittance to Miss Snowe, who sailed up to him in her floating white draperies, a vision of perfect queenly beauty.

He advanced to meet her with the easy cordiality of an old friend. His greeting was frank and pleasant, and free from the slightest tinge of embarrassment. Not so the lady, who seemed suffering under the most violent agitation. She bowed silently in answer to his congratulations; then raising her eyes and gazing steadily at him, she went right to the point.

"Mr. Winchester, I am going to do a strange thing for me. I am going to act honestly. You told me once that you loved me. You asked me to be your wife. I was afraid of poverty, and I told you no. I told you that I had nothing but friendship to offer you. I lied. I love you with a love so true, so deep, so intense that it astonishes even myself. I have come to you, even now, while my bridegroom is awaiting me in the next room, to give myself to you. I will try to endure poverty for your sake, and in promising that I give the greatest proof of love that Agnes Snowe can possibly give to any human being. Paul, Paul, my love! are you still mine? Do you still love me?" And she held out her hands with a gesture almost pleading

while there came into her fine eyes more of the woman than was ever seen by mortal man before that night, or ever after.

For a moment Mr. Winchester stood paralyzed by contending emotions. Then the loyal love he had borne his cousin from childhood up to the present hour asserted its supremacy.

He came up to the trembling girl, and, taking both her hands in his, he looked down into her agitated face very kindly but very gravely, as he replied,—

“Miss Snowe, when I made you an offer of my hand and name, it was with the full consciousness that my cousin loved you as dearly as I. Otis and I have grown up together, and have no secrets from each other. He generously stood aside, a few months ago, and bade me God speed when I went to sue for your hand. He loves you very dearly, and is worthy of something better than the cold respect you seem to consider ample reward for his generous devotion. He is supremely happy in the prospect of his marriage with you, and I think your heart would smite you if you could have heard as I have been hearing for the past few days the poor fellow's plans for your happiness; his queen, his empress, he calls you. I know Otis Barrow. I know all his virtues and his faults. I know him and I love him. He loves me and he trusts me, and I would be ten times a villain, deserving the contempt of all good men and women, if I could rob him of his bride in this the hour of his expected happiness.”

When he had first commenced speaking, a blush of crimson shame had mantled the bride's pallid cheek, that had died away long since and left her looking as cold and still as a marble statue.

Presently she managed to disengage her hands from his clasp, and in a voice as if nothing but the most ordinary conversation had been engaging their attention, she remarked, pointing to the clock,—

“See, it is ten minutes past eight! will you call my father? Mr. Barrow will begin to wonder.”

"Agnes," began Mr. Winchester, "do not consummate this thing without pausing to——"

"Mr. Winchester," said Miss Snowe, with a frigid look from her cold gray eyes, "I believe you are a gentleman?"

This was said interrogatively.

"I hope so, Miss Snowe."

"Then you have forgotten, by this time, all that has passed between us this evening, and will oblige me by escorting your cousin to this room."

Mr. Winchester left the room to release the imprisoned and impatient bridegroom. Within the space of the next quarter of an hour the deed was done. Agnes Snowe promising, in a clear, audible voice, "to have and to hold from that day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and to obey, till death them did part," a man for whom she did not entertain one iota of even kindly feeling.

It was a dismal sort of a wedding, try as everybody might to make believe it wasn't. The minister was a dismal sort of a dignitary, who shuffled over the beautiful service of the church in a dreary we're-all-poor-miserable-sinners sort of a way, and pronounced a benediction which sounded most uncommonly like a funeral sermon.

Becky was dismal because she saw farther into the future than some of those present, and saw visions there that did not tend to make her heart light or her manners gay.

Julia was dismal because all her loveliness as bridesmaid was thrown away on the most unappreciative of spectators.

The bride was dismal because, notwithstanding the brave front she carried, she was almost frightened at that night's work.

Mr. Winchester was dismal because he could see but little chance for domestic happiness for his cousin in this marriage, and he knew Otis well enough to feel

assured that he would not take the disappointment, which was inevitably in store for him, kindly.

Major Snowe looked dismal because he had a vague sort of a notion that he ought to feel sorry at losing his handsome daughter, though, if he had been put upon oath, he *could* not have sworn that he was.

The bridegroom alone looked supremely, intensely, redly happy. But even he gave a little nervous start, as a most lugubrious, mournful, despairing howl smote upon the night air, in close proximity to the parlor windows.

It was a wail mournful enough and unearthly enough to have been uttered by a lost spirit, but which, in reality, emanated from the throat of a superannuated hound belonging to Major Snowe, who was in the habit of spending his winter evenings on the rug, in front of the fire, and not being able to understand the cause for his exclusion therefrom on this particular evening, he entered his protest against the general heartlessness prevailing by giving utterance to that long-drawn wail, which put to flight the last remnant of gayety in the bridal-party within.

Altogether, I think Julia's comparison about graveyards and tombstones, and wet blankets, was a tolerably correct one.

CHAPTER IX.

IS DR. LOMBARD'S.

DR. LOMBARD has been promised a chapter all to himself. A very indiscreet promise I consider it upon reflection, and a very inconvenient one to fulfill, for after all is told about him that needs to be told by way of introduction, it will hardly make two good-sized paragraphs.

The doctor was one of those men who get the epithet "old" tacked on to them long before they are chronologically entitled to it. He was but slightly past forty at the time of Agnes Snowe's marriage, and yet he had been "Old Dr. Lombard" for ever so long. His personal appearance, I suppose, was responsible for this. He was quite tall, but slender to the verge of meagerness; besides, he stooped badly, from habit rather than want of strength. Then, again, his hair, which was quite thin on top, was thickly flecked with white. He had a pair of big, brown, thoughtful eyes, that rather looked through you than at you. His general cast of countenance was grave, almost to solemnity; but if a bon-mot was gotten off in his presence, or some praiseworthy deed told of, his large, firm mouth would broaden into an appreciative smile, or his fine eyes light up with feeling, until you were surprised into the conviction that Dr. Lombard had a decidedly handsome face.

He was scrupulously neat in his person. Always wore the most faultless linen, the most highly-polished boots, and the most unexceptionable gloves and hats. He was as dainty as a woman about his long acorn-shaped finger-nails, and was accused by malicious folks of being the least bit in the world proud of them.

and of a magnificent set of dazzling teeth. Who knows? the greatest of men are sometimes afflicted with the smallest of foibles,—par exemple, Murat and his white plume.

To strangers he was stiffly courteous, to friends frank and easy, not to say jocular, but to those for whom he had conceived a dislike he was brusque even to rudeness. Notwithstanding which, at heart, there never was a more tender, gentle, sympathetic mortal than this same "old Dr. Lombard."

He had been practicing in the neighborhood of Silver Lake for years, and why he had not grown to be a rich man in that time was a mystery to all his friends. He had a monopoly of the practice. There were no objects of charity in the neighborhood, nor was he addicted to any of the small vices (?) by which gentlemen contrive to lighten their purses. So where did his money go to?

Mrs. Grundy wearied herself unsuccessfully in trying to find out, gave the task up as hopeless, and turned her attention to somebody else's private affairs, and Dr. Lombard went on his way utterly unconscious of the curiosity he had unwittingly aroused.

Tanglewood was the one place where he was ever known to visit sociably. Some said he was in love with Miss Snowe, others declared that they had heard him give Miss Julia's beauty precedence, and still others declared that it was admiration for Miss Becky's more sterling charms that drew him there. Be that as it may, certain it is that up to the moment of Agnes's wedding he had never given either of the three young ladies of Tanglewood the slightest reason for thinking that he came there for any other object than to talk politics with their father or engage in a game of chess with the old gentleman, for which good-natured act he was always silently blessed by the three Misses Snowe. He never waited for an invitation to Tanglewood, but would ride up to the rack, hitch his horse, dismount, and, throwing his saddle-

bags over his arm, would enter the house with the air of a man pretty sure of his welcome, which, indeed, he was.

Then Becky would have the spare bedroom fixed for his reception, and would order muffins for tea; for the doctor must always have his favorite dishes, and his habits and tastes were as well known to the Tanglewood people as to himself.

From all of which you will have drawn the correct conclusion that Dr. Lombard was not only the medical adviser of the Snowe family, but also *l'ami du maison*, as is every country doctor who is worth a rush.

Now, then, doctor, you have had your chapter.

CHAPTER X.

FICTITIOUS HAPPINESS.

MR. BARROW had taken his beautiful bride to Aland and installed her as mistress thereof with joy and pride unspeakable. He was feverishly anxious that everything there should meet with her royal approval. He gloried in the possession of the wealth that was to enable him to gratify every desire of his sultana's heart. Altogether, he was in that state of beatific happiness and uxorious devotion which can be most felicitously expressed by the one word "spooney."

Now, if I did not have such illustrious precedents as Dickens, Thackeray, and Kingsley to support me in the use of that doubtful word "spooney," I might feel called upon to insert an apologetic paragraph in its defense, for, indeed, it is just the word I wanted, and I know of no combination of monosyllables, dissyllables, or polysyllables that would convey half so readily an idea of Mr. Otis Barrow's condition.

As for Mrs. Barrow, she showed herself fully equal to the occasion. When old Dora delivered up the keys, with a little hard-studied speech, remarkable, principally, for its dignity and bad grammar, Agnes received them with graceful suavity, and assured the retiring dignitary that she expected she would have to appeal to her very often for advice and instruction, as she was shamefully ignorant of all housekeeping details. A speech which Aunt Dora acknowledged with a curtsy and a grunt—the curtsy signifying acquiescence in the new order of things; the grunt implying that she was fully aware of Mrs. Barrow's ineligibility to office.

Agnes treated her husband with an off-hand sort of kindness, for which she gave herself great credit. In fact, she believed she really *felt* kindly toward him. He was so good to her, and seemed so anxious to gratify her every expressed desire, and to anticipate her unexpressed ones, that the cold, dull pulses of her selfish heart were actually quickened into something like gratitude. Moreover, now that he was in his own home, where he was master and where a hundred obsequious slaves were forever testifying to that fact, her respect for him increased amazingly. She discovered a certain dignity about him that had been totally lacking in the blushing, bungling, awkward young man who had sued so humbly for her hand.

He was in his own house now and at his ease with her as his wife, which he never had been with Miss Snowe, his cold, capricious, repellant lady-love. Hence Mrs. Barrow found herself treating her husband with a species of dignified politeness, which she declared to herself was the perfection of conjugal etiquette, and far preferable to those inane protestations and sickening endearments which render the honey-moon so trying a period to all sensible people. Besides, Otis was quite affectionate enough for two, and she accepted his rather oppressive demonstrations with a placid grace that should have proved entirely satisfactory to

the most ardent of newly-made spouses. It was rather pleasant than otherwise to have the dull monotony of life in a stupid country house broken up by the active adulation of her husband, and things at Aland were gliding along in so satisfactory a style that Agnes mentally pronounced Becky a false prophetess and a silly croaker, and herself a model wife.

In his gratitude to Miss Snowe for having condescended to accept his large fortune with the modest encumbrance of his own devoted self, Mr. Barrow's heart melted toward every one of the name of Snowe. He insisted upon Julia's being brought to Aland, and encouraged his wife in making her sister's heart glad with frequent and costly gifts with which to beautify her dainty self.

Agnes proved amiably acquiescent to all such suggestions. It was even arranged that Julia was to go traveling with them that summer, but before their flitting they were to give a house-warming, which they did give early in the spring after their marriage, to which all the neighboring gentry were bidden, and came and went away pronouncing Mrs. Barrow and her diamonds and her supper and her servants "perfect."

Mr. Barrow experienced a slight shade of disappointment at his young wife's eagerness to leave so soon the home he had taken so much pride and pleasure in fitting up for her. He would infinitely have preferred spending that whole summer on the plantation, but Agnes panted to go out into the world, now that she could make an appearance in it befitting her regal beauty, and she possessed neither the desire nor intention of being immured at Aland and wasting her charms upon her husband only, let him be never so devoted a spouse.

With the instinctive perception of all cold, selfish natures, who have no feelings of their own to interfere with their analytical observations of others, Agnes Barrow had discovered the fact that with all her hus-

band's apparent good humor and readiness to yield, there was an under-current of stubbornness in his disposition which it would be just as well not to provoke into activity by any premature display of determination on her own part; so when she saw that in reality he cordially disliked the idea of leaving his home so soon after having returned to it, with the full intention of staying there, instead of acting as she would really have liked to do,—*i.e.* informed him, imperiously, that if he had only married her to immure her at Aland, she really could not see what she had made by the exchange,—she pursued the far wiser course of making it impossible for him to refuse her by converting herself temporarily into the kind of woman she knew his wife *ought* to have been. She forced herself to visit the dairies, where she would stand in the doorway, holding her spotless skirts up daintily, to prevent their coming in contact with the equally spotless floors, and after addressing some half-dozen deplorably ignorant questions to the dairy-maid, she would pass judgment on the appearance of everything in a ridiculously crude manner that would provoke a furtive smile on the old milk-woman's wrinkled face; then she would pass on to the poultry-yards, where, peeping through the fence, she would distinguish herself by a second display of profound ignorance. Then she would go back to the house, priding herself on the fact that when Otis came in from the field she would have quite a stock of domestic lore to entertain him with. Then she would dutifully examine her husband's wardrobe, and experience something almost like regret that Mr. Barrow had considered it necessary to get *everything* new, and in such tremendous quantities, that it would be utterly impossible for her to have any mending to do for the next six months. There were no less than three dozen brand-new pairs of socks in his bureau, and unless she punched holes in them on purpose, how could she find any darning to do? Then he wore studs and sleeve-buttons, so where were any buttons to sew on? Very

vexatious truly, for until a man sees his wife sewing on buttons and darning socks, he does not realize that he has one.

Malgré the buttons and the socks, Mrs. Barrow carried the day. In fact, there had been no expressed opposition on the part of her husband, but she perceived the disinclination on his part to leaving, and had rather feared he might ask her if she wouldn't stay at home, which she didn't want him to ask her. So she behaved so sweetly and talked so adroitly about her anxiety to see something of the world, that before the time for their departure had arrived, Mr. Barrow had relinquished any hope he might secretly have entertained of spending a quiet summer at home, and had, in fact, told himself that it was a great piece of selfishness on his part not to desire this move more cordially than he did.

After she has seen a little of the world, she won't have such a hankering after it, he soliloquized; and she will come back and settle down with a better will to the earnest duties that will devolve on her as a planter's wife. So I will gratify her to the top of her bent for this whole year. She's young and pretty, and it's natural she should want a little change after her humdrum life at Tanglewood. I won't cross you in a solitary wish, my beautiful Aggie; and then I hope, when you see how anxious I am for your happiness, you will be willing to turn in and help me along in the world as every true-hearted wife must help her husband.

In the utterance of that hope, Mr. Barrow had unconsciously admitted the presence of a doubt.

So, early in the month of June, just a little over a year from the day when old Dora had thrown open the doors of Aland, so joyously, to welcome its master home, its doors were closed again, and that master, accompanied by his beautiful wife and her hardly less beautiful sister, had turned his back on the old plantation "to go and see the world."

The world, as spoken of by such women as Mrs. Barrow and her sister, means fashionable watering-places, crowded with soulless and brainless human butterflies. But among all the said butterflies that flitted from spot to spot during the summer in question, there were none of brighter hues or lighter wing than the chrysalides that Mr. Barrow had imported into the fluttering throng.

"They were gorgeous! they were glorious! they were dazzling!" And from post to post, from triumph to triumph, they passed, followed submissively by Mr. Barrow, who by the time they reached Saratoga had given his last dying flicker of independence, and subsided into a position compounded of purse-bearer, adoring husband, and amateur showman.

So suddenly and completely had he been swept into the position of "Timothy Pettigrew's wife's husband" by his wife's triumphant entrée into the beau-monde, that when she informed him, after a week's stay at Saratoga, that "it would not be the thing" to go home without having taken a bridal trip to Europe, he sat down uncomplainingly and wrote letters to his managers, informing them of his intention to visit Europe, and Agnes and Julia wrote letters home to Tanglewood to the same effect,—letters very full of egotistic vanity, and very empty of any affection or interest in their old father and lonely sister.

To explain Mr. Barrow's ready acquiescence I must tell you that he did not yield because he could not oppose. But since he had brought his beautiful wife out into the world, and had seen her beauty tenfold enhanced by elegant and tasty dressing, and had seen her, in the fullness of her triumphant joy, growing gayer and brighter than he had ever seen her as Agnes Snowe, and when, in gratitude to the man who was the instrument of all this intoxicating happiness, she had grown almost affectionate to her husband, his infatuation had increased in proportion to her increased charms, so that no wonder she found it easy work to coax him across the ocean.

So across it they went, and whirled from point to point, after the fashion of American travelers, until they whirled into the champagne district of France, and there, in the town of Rheims, where Mr. Barrow stopped to select a wine merchant, Miss Julia Snowe met her fate, in the person of an elegant-looking, vivacious little wine prince, one of the aristocracy of the place, who fell madly in love with *la belle Américaine*, convinced her brother-in-law of his eligibility on the score of family and personal character, satisfied the young lady that he was wealthy enough to gratify her every wish, let it be never so extravagant, and was rewarded with the promise of her hand. He pleaded for an early marriage. Mr. Barrow opposed it. It was but right that he should accompany the young lady home and receive her father's sanction.

Here Miss Snowe interfered, and took the matter into her own hands. To Agnes she said, privately, "I have no notion of letting Monsieur Verzenay accompany me home to that stuffy old house of ours since I've seen the splendid chateau in which his mother lives, nor do I care about being put to the blush by poor, old, obsolete Becky since I have come to know that exquisite Adèle Verzenay. Father won't shed a tear if he never sees me again; so if you and Mr. Barrow will stop here in Rheims for about a month, I will tell Lucien to-morrow that I will marry him at the end of that time."

As Mrs. Barrow was as entirely free from any sentimental notions on the subject of filial duty as was her sister, she did not raise one objection to the plan. Finding himself sadly in the minority, Mr. Barrow had to yield, which he did tolerably gracefully, only uttering one faint protest against the apparent heartlessness of the proceeding. So the next day Monsieur Lucien Verzenay's heart was made glad by being told that he should carry *la belle Américaine* home to the old chateau as his bride if he would wait patiently for one little month.

At the end of that time of probation Julia Snowe became Madame Verzenay, and removed to the chateau which had so delighted her eyes, where she was received with an affectionate cordiality and charming grace by the two lovely relatives of her husband, his mother and sister, who were completely captivated by the beauty and apparent guilelessness of this young American girl, which would hardly have been accorded her if they had been aware of her heartlessness in ignoring her father and sister in her eagerness to secure a wealthy *parti*. So, for awhile, we lose sight of Madame Lucien Verzenay, *née* Julia Snowe.

The wheel of fortune had been gilded so gorgeously by fate, and had taken to revolving with such dazzling rapidity, and in its revolutions had brought golden prizes to the two Miss Snowes in so wonderfully unexpected a fashion, that it was almost impossible for them to realize that it was the same wheel against whose sluggish revolutions they used to utter such vain and bitter repinings in the shabby little house nestling amid the trees on the quiet, peaceful banks of Silver Lake.

As nature had not burdened these two dames with more than a minimum of heart, it was with the greatest facility that they effloresced into women of fashion of the very first water. Mrs. Barrow queened it *à la Juno*, Madame Lucien Verzenay rippled, and sparkled, and effervesced like the bubbles of her husband's champagne.

Let us hope that her husband's happiness prove not as evanescent as those same bubbles.

CHAPTER XI.

"OBSOLETE BECKY."

WHEN Julia's letter, announcing her approaching marriage, in curt, flippant sentences, reached Tanglewood, it created a commotion that would have been pronounced "highly absurd" by the soulless writer thereof, if she had been cognizant of it.

Becky had been more than a sister to Julia. She had been sister, mother, playmate, all in one; and to have her step entirely out of her old life into the new, without expressing one regret, or even considering it worth while to come home to be married, struck our true-hearted Becky as heartless and cruel in the extreme. The letter containing the announcement had been addressed to Major Snowe. He had read it twice over before handing it to Becky for perusal. Then he passed it across the table, with this comment:

"My other butterfly has flown. My girl, I wonder how long it will be before you tire of the old man and the old house, and take French leave of them, too?"

Wonderingly, Becky reached out her hand for the letter. She, too, read it twice over in silence; then she laid her head down on the teatray before her, and burst into a flood of tears. Julia's exceeding heartlessness had wounded her sorely, and she cried as if her poor, honest heart would break.

Major Snowe pushed his chair back from the table with an impatient grunt, and, walking into his study, planted himself in his great leather arm-chair, where he sat smoking pipe after pipe, only taking his meersch-chaum out of his mouth long enough to submit to be hugged and caressed by Becky, who, coming in about

an hour after breakfast, had walked straight up to the lonely old man and put her arms around his neck and answered the question he had asked her when he handed her Julia's letter, by a fervent,—

“Never, father,—never!”

Then Becky went out into the kitchen and told old Patience that Julia, her youngest nursling, her pet, was not coming back to them any more. That she had married a rich Frenchman away over in his own country, and had gone suddenly and completely out of their sphere.

As old Patience was rapidly falling into her dotage, and was actively awake to but two interests in life,—her weekly supply of tobacco and her winter's complement of red flannel,—she received this news with a stoical indifference that rather disgusted poor Becky, whose active sorrow craved active sympathy. She did not wish to speak to her father much on the subject, for, although he had not uttered one reproach against the offender, Becky knew he felt her unfilial conduct deeply, for he persisted in being left to himself all that day. He smoked furiously and incessantly, and he forgot to call for his game of chess. That last departure from his daily routine was proof conclusive of great internal commotion.

So, driven within herself for sympathy, Becky returned to the house and mounted the stairs leading to the little bedroom that had once belonged to “the girls.” She smiled sadly and a little bitterly as she stood within the cramped little apartment. “It would look very poor and mean to them now, I guess, they’ve gotten used to so much elegance,” she soliloquized, as she went about dismantling the room; for they would never come back to sleep in the little slim-posted bedstead, nor would the poor little oval looking-glass ever again reflect their beautiful, cold faces. So Becky went about folding up bedclothes, taking down curtains, dismantling the toilet-table, emptying the water from the now useless ewer on the washstand, feeling

all the time as if somebody had died and the funeral was just over.

She folded away all the wearing apparel her sisters had left behind them into one large trunk. There was the little linen collar with the tiny breastpin stuck in it, just as careless Julia had thrown them into her top drawer on the morning of her departure. "Madame Verzenay would laugh at this poor little pin," thought Becky as she laid it with the other things, "but Jule thought it once a very pretty birthday present." She pulled open a bureau drawer that used to belong to Agnes. There was nothing in it but a little scrap of a note, signed "P. Winchester," written from Aland, during his visit there, and simply containing the regrets of the two young gentlemen at hearing of Miss Snowe's indisposition, hoped, etc. The other contents of the drawer were some half-dozen dead flowers—single blossoms—that he had offered at various times. She had treasured these poor little tokens; but where was any sign of the mammoth bouquets that poor Otis used to bring so often? There was none there,—the flowers had found no more place in the drawer than had their donor in his wife's heart.

Becky sighed as she picked up these little straws of confirmation, and then she said to herself, with a little burst of indignation, that Agnes ought to be ashamed of herself not to have destroyed these things; then she declared she would do it herself; then she looked once more at the poor, faded, harmless tokens of a love that was as dead as their own withered selves, and laying them gently back, she turned the key in the drawer, and left them there to moulder. They are not mine, reasoned Becky; and if, when she comes back to Aland, she should take a fancy to come over after them, she would think I had been prying into her secrets.

After Becky had made her sister's room look as much as possible like an apartment that a corpse had just been carried out of, and had succeeded in working herself up into feeling as if one just had, she came out of

it, locked the door, put the key on a high nail in the hall, and ran quickly down-stairs, feeling more nervous and foolish than it often came to the sensible Rebecca to feel.

Julia and Agnes had gone out of her ken and her life without one regret; so, now that she had put out of sight everything that could possibly remind her of them, she would try and not think of them any more. She would live for her father. He and she would live entirely for each other, and not spend another regret on these two bad, cold, cruel girls; which stoical resolve she carried into immediate execution by sitting down on the hard little sofa in the parlor and giving herself up to another big cry.

She was still crying and sobbing, and vowing she wouldn't shed another tear, and then shedding them in a perfect shower by way of sealing her vow, when the parlor door was softly opened, and, jumping up from her recumbent position on the sofa, she faced round upon Dr. Lombard. Now, if Becky had been a vain woman, she would have been conscious of nothing but her frizzly head, her red eyes, and her swollen nose; but she was not vain, and she was only conscious that there stood good, kind Dr. Lombard, with a look of half-puzzled sympathy in his great brown eyes.

The puzzled look meant what on earth can have come over the sensible, cheery Miss Rebecca, to have reduced her to a state of such uncontrollable agitation? The look of sympathy sprang unquestioning from his soft heart; he saw that trouble was there, and his gentle, pitying soul was always on the alert to soothe the pangs of a fellow-mortal.

"Oh, Dr. Lombard! have you heard?" cried Becky, springing forward to clasp his outstretched hand, and looking up into his kind face with brimming eyes.

"Heard what?" asked the physician, leading her at the same time back to the sofa, and seating himself beside her.

Then, hurriedly and brokenly, Becky told him all

that was in her wounded heart, and wound up with a little plaintive assertion, "And, oh, doctor! they've left me so lonely."

Dr. Lombard's fine face lighted up with something that was not pity, nor was it sympathy.

He had come to Tanglewood with an object that day, said object being to ask Becky to become his wife. He had studied up innumerable little speeches on the way hither. Laconic, dignified, sensible little speeches, worthy of himself, of straightforward Becky, and of the momentous occasion, but he had forgotten every word of his premeditated speeches at the very moment when he laid his hand upon the parlor door-knob, and was searching his dazed brains in vain for some appropriate phrase with which to open his suit, when all of a sudden she herself helped him out of the muddle by telling him, in that little pathetic voice, that her sisters' defection had left her lonely.

He told her eagerly and earnestly how glad he would be to relieve her of that burden of loneliness. How sweet it would be to him to enter into a life companionship with her, truer, more complete, more satisfying, than she ever could have known with her unloving sisters. He told her that he had been watching her closely, and loving her dearly for a long, long time, and now, if she would only consent to become his own dear wife, he would have nothing left to wish for.

Rebecca listened to him at first in unfeigned surprise. She had never thought of Dr. Lombard in the light of a possible lover, and for that very reason, I suppose, she had shown herself in her best and truest character to him, unconsciously winning his heart thereby. But now that she knew that he loved her, and had been asked by him plainly to be his wife, did she care enough for him to say "yes" without laying herself open to the charge of committing the same offense that she censured Agnes for so severely? But, then, Mr. Barrow was rich and Dr. Lombard was poor,

so she could not be actuated by mercenary motives. But did she love him? Not as folks love in novels,—she knew that. It would not have broken her heart if Dr. Lombard had never spoken the words that he had just spoken so kindly and earnestly, nor did she suppose it would break his heart now if she said no instead of yes. She felt very certain of one thing,—she did *not* care any more for anybody else than she did for Dr. Lombard, and as she should never leave the old place or her father, it was not likely she ever would come across a hero of romance. She knew that Dr. Lombard's visits had always given her sincere pleasure. She had never found him tiresome and prosy, as Agnes had declared him. And then it was no small thing to be loved earnestly and disinterestedly by a true-hearted honest man, who was looked up to and respected by the whole community. It would not be a very brilliant match, but she, plain Becky Snowe, neither expected nor desired a brilliant match. She honestly believed that this offer of Dr. Lombard's promised her as much happiness as she could ever expect, so she thought she would say "yes." But, then, she had promised her father that very morning that she would never, never leave him, and here she was almost consenting to do that very thing before night-fall. At this new complication, just when she had made up her mind that she could say "yes" without doing any violence to her own feelings, or any injustice to his, poor Becky's eyes brimmed over again, and she turned to her suitor a little impatiently, saying, in a quick, harsh voice,—

"It cannot be, Dr. Lombard. I promised poor father only this morning that I would never, never leave him, and I will not. Poor old father," she went on, in a voice full of pity, "he may not have contrived very well for us, but he did his best, and so far he has had very little comfort from his children."

"Is that your only objection, Rebecca?" asked the doctor, smiling a little anxious smile.

"The only one," she returned, looking him full in the face with her bright, honest eyes.

"Then you are mine," he exclaimed, growing happy and animated and handsome all in a moment, "for I never intended that poor old Major Snowe should be left alone, and if he and you will be willing to admit my pill-boxes and saddle-bags into the family as well as myself, we will all three promise to occupy as little room as possible. We can live together either here or at my place."

"What a silly, not to have thought of that myself!"

Then Dr. Lombard went off to the study to find Major Snowe and to communicate to him his desires and plans.

At last Major Snowe had a son-in-law after his own heart. "Lombard had always struck him as being just the kind of man a sensible girl would fall in love with." And he congratulated Becky heartily on the prize she had drawn.

Thus it came about that when Mr. and Mrs. Barrow returned to Aland, a little over a year from the time they had left it, old Dora communicated to them as the most important item in her budget of news, the fact that Miss Rebecca and Dr. Lombard had been married "jes' one week."

Now, Mrs. Barrow was too thorough a woman of ton to make any display of so vulgar an emotion as surprise, so she merely looked across the table at her husband with a little elevation of her eyebrows and a slight French shrug of the shoulders, as she remarked, carelessly, "Poor old Becky! I suppose she wrote, but we missed the letter."

"Gad! I'm glad to hear it," exclaimed Mr. Barrow, heartily.

"Pray, why?" asked his wife, coldly.

"Because Lombard's a real good fellow, and I'm glad to hear that he's got so good a wife."

Mr. Barrow had begun to appreciate the domestic, you perceive.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WORK OF ALIENATION.

THE work of alienation began at Aland almost before the honey-moon had expired, and progressed with alarming rapidity.

Mrs. Barrow at home and Mrs. Barrow abroad were two sadly dissimilar personages, as Mr. Barrow began to realize to his cost.

They had been married for nearly two years. More than a year of that time had the young husband yielded up entirely to the desires and caprices of his rather exacting bride. He had lavished money upon her until her gorgeous and elegant dressing had become a matter of public fame. He had acceded to her wishes in the matter of traveling until his own soul had fairly yearned for the peace and quiet of his country home.

They had come back to it at last, and Otis thought he had fairly earned his reward and was entitled to look for a little of that domestic happiness which, according to his homely notions, was, after all, the only true happiness.

His spirits rose wonderfully at sight of the old house, and as he and Agnes sat over their breakfast a few mornings after their return, he rattled away incessantly about his plans, or rather their plans. They must do this thing, and they must look into that thing, and so on, until his wife looked at his animated face in astonishment, and checked the flow of his domestic eloquence with a peevish protest:

"Why, Mr. Barrow, you've talked more in five minutes since we got home than in all the time we've been gone, and all about your stupid cows and pigs and horses."

"I am sorry you find these subjects so very stupid, Agnes, as for some time to come you will see and hear very little else."

"No necessity for reminding me of that, I'm sure. I'm hardly likely to forget it, and I expect to die outright before the year is over."

Mr. Barrow looked at her gloomily, and pushing his chair impatiently back from the table, strode out of the room. He found a delegation from the quarters waiting for him at the front door. It consisted of some seven or eight women, each with a huge steel thimble on her finger, and a hank of homespun yarn thrown across her arm. The forewoman was armed with a pair of formidable shears.

"Sacks, master," was the laconic statement of their errand, made by the forewoman after having greeted the master with a respectful little curtsy.

"Go to your mistress," said Mr. Barrow, in rather a snappish tone; and, turning off from the group, he passed into the library, to await the result of this first hint to his wife that she had duties to perform, and that he fully expected she should perform them.

Mrs. Barrow had left the table almost immediately after her husband. She had gone back to her own room, thrown herself into a rocking-chair, and was idly watching her maid, as with deft fingers she was folding and laying away the rustling silks and fancy laces that filled the huge trunks standing in a row against the wall.

"When will I wear them again?" sighed the beautiful Mrs. Barrow, as she gazed tenderly at the glistening robes that had aided her many triumphs in the beau-monde. Each rustling robe was associated with some glorious victory, or some night of intoxicating happiness, and she was going back over it all in memory when the room door was darkened by the appearance of the delegation, and the lady's dreaming was brought to an end by the repetition of the cabalistic words:

"Sacks, mistiss."

"Sacks!" repeated Mrs. Barrow, looking at the woman in undisguised amazement.

"Cotton sacks, mistiss."

"Well," said the lady, impatiently, "what have I got to do with your cotton sacks?"

"Master sen' us to you, mistiss," answered the spokeswoman, respectfully.

"To do what, I ask you?"

"To gin out, mistiss."

Mrs. Barrow's face flushed angrily. If he expected her to assist in this plantation work, it was best to let him know at once that she proposed doing no such thing.

"Where is your master?"

"In de library, mistiss."

Mrs. Barrow swept loftily by the group of gaping negroes, and made her way to the library.

Her husband was sitting there apparently smoking his morning cigar in a very amicable frame of mind. In reality, steeling himself for the altercation with his wife, which he felt to be inevitable.

"Mr. Barrow," began his wife, fixing upon him one of those icy glances with which the inhabitants of the Point were erst so familiar, "what is it you sent those negroes to me for?"

"Couldn't the old fool tell you herself what she wanted?" asked Mr. Barrow, taking the cigar from between his lips and meeting his wife's fixed gaze with one that betokened equal determination.

"She said she wanted the cotton sacks," replied Mrs. Barrow, in a tone that meant that the enormity of the request rendered it incredible.

"Well, then, madam, I suppose sacks are what is wanted."

"Who has been in the habit of attending to this branch of your plantation business?"

"My housekeeper, madam."

"Then she had better continue to do so."

"Exactly what I thought when I sent them to you."

"I expect, sir, to attend rigidly to everything that belongs properly to my sphere as housekeeper. This does not, and I decline having anything whatever to do with it."

"Every planter's wife, Mrs. Barrow, and you as a planter's daughter should be fully aware of the fact, has certain duties and responsibilities in connection with the quarters that no true-hearted wife cares about shirking. In times of sickness, it is mistress not master our poor childlike slaves call for. In the matter of giving out their clothing, it is generally conceded that the mistress's judgment is better than the master's. There are numerous other small duties that will devolve upon you as a slaveholder's wife, which you may as well face at once. May I ask who shouldered all these responsibilities in your own home, that you are so profoundly ignorant of them?"

"Rebecca," was Mrs. Barrow's curt rejoinder.

"Unfortunately," continued her husband, "we have no Rebecca here, so you will have to assume these degrading duties yourself. At present all that is asked of you is to take the key of the long room, opening from your laundry, and stand in the door, unless you prefer sitting on a bale of Lowell, and see that the woman who asked you for the sacks cuts off three yards of Lowells for each sack, and cuts out seventy-nine of those sacks. This I believe is the key." And stepping toward the mantel-piece, he took from a nail a long brass key.

"You need not trouble yourself, Mr. Barrow. I have no use for that key."

"You mean that you refuse to attend to this thing?"

"I mean that I refuse to have anything whatever to do with your plantation affairs now and forever."

Otis Barrow was not a ready man, and he was so completely taken aback by this display of obstinacy and false pride and ingratitude on the part of the woman whom he had so recently raised from almost

abject poverty, that he stood motionless and speechless, still holding the key outstretched in his hand, and wondering what combination of words or course of reasoning could be conjured up to bring his defiant spouse to a sense of her duty.

Mrs. Barrow took his silence as a token of surrender, and swept out of the room, congratulating herself on having won the victory so easily. Mistaken woman!

There is a wise old proverb somewhere, which advises folks to "let sleeping dogs lie;" but unfortunately there is the smallest number of people in this turbulent world who are wise enough to comprehend the great need of so doing.

There are sleeping dogs around every one of us that we had best let sleep on, and which we will strive in vain to lull to repose again after the fatal awakening.

There are the dogs of distrust, of suspicion, of jealousy, of cruelty, of despair, of hatred,—an ugly pack, and one easily aroused. A look, an angry word, an unjust aspersion, a false assertion,—any one is all-sufficient.

An empty vinegar-cruet roused the sleeping dog at Aland! Wives who are prone to forget the castors, read and take warning.

There were premonitory signs of awakening about Otis Barrow, which it would have been well for his careless wife if she had taken some note of; but she either did not see them, or else (now that there was nothing to be gained by deceit) she scorned to use policy.

Otis had yielded to her in the matter of those odious cotton sacks, and as soon as he showed that he was sorry for their little conjugal spat, she would make up with him. Such was Mrs. Barrow's mental resolution.

Mr. Barrow's mental resolution cannot be summed up in so few words.

When his wife had swept out of the room so triumphantly, his first impulse was to send an authorita-

tive message to her to come back to him. But he felt pretty sure that such a proceeding on his part would result in a domestic scene, with a dozen gaping slaves for witnesses. He would get rid of them first.

He rang the library bell. It was answered promptly by his own body-servant. Mr. Barrow handed him the key.

"Take this to Dora and tell her that Mrs. Barrow is too much fatigued after her journey to attend to the sacks, so she must give them out herself. Then bring round my horse."

The boy disappeared to do his master's bidding, and in a few minutes reappeared in front of the house with Mr. Barrow's horse. The young man came out immediately, mounted the animal, and having gained the main road, he turned in the direction that led to one of his plantations about four miles distant from Aland.

He would think well before speaking.

Otis Barrow had one most unfortunate trait of character. He was given to brooding. He would brood over a wrong done him until it assumed most gigantic proportions. There was much that was good in his disposition, however, and if he had married an amiable, sensible domestic woman,—in short, if he had married Rebecca Snowe, in place of Agnes Snowe, he would have gone through life happily enough, trotting along cheerily in the matrimonial harness at an even placid jog-trot, contented with his lot, contented with his mate, and contented with the world, because he was contented with himself. There were reserves of coarseness and hardness in his nature that might never have made themselves apparent under the domestic manipulation of a wiser woman,—sleeping dogs of stubbornness and harshness that would have slept on forever, basking in the sunshine of a happy home. But Agnes Barrow was not a wise woman, and her defiant refusal to take part or lot in her husband's domestic affairs had aroused all that was bad in the young man's nature into fearful activity.

Arrived at Beechland, Mr. Barrow held an interview with his overseer, gave his attention to business for an hour or two, then shut himself up in his own room, with orders that he was to be disturbed by no one.

If he had been a readier man or a wiser man, he could have settled his domestic grievances with so little trouble. He would have waited until temper had had time to subside on both sides, and he would have gone to his wife and told her firmly but gently where he thought the fault lay, and he would have endeavored to bring her to a sense of her duty as a wife by a few calmly-spoken words of good hard common sense. Then, if she had still held out in her defiant resolution, he would at least have had the satisfaction of knowing that he was blameless.

But unfortunately Otis Barrow was not a strong man, nor a wise one. He recognized but one fact and one duty. His wife had defied him. He must show his wife that he intended to be master. And how to impress that needful piece of information upon Mrs. Barrow was the mighty difficulty that set him to pacing up and down his bedroom at Beechland, with hands clasped behind his back, with moody eyes fixed upon the carpet, and great cords standing out on his forehead.

"She *must* be broken," resolved the husband. She will be hard to break, thought the man who knew her.

He had loved his wife when he married her. Had loved her and wanted to make her happy. He had been all that was kind and generous to her. He had lavished more money on her in their short married life than she had possessed in all her life put together before. He had yielded to her in the matter of traveling, when both duty and inclination had dictated his return home. And now, what return was she making him for all this? She had been peevish and listless from the moment she had set foot in her own home and lost sight of the gay outside world. She had lain aside all

her pretty airs and sweet smiles with her silks and laces, not caring to waste them on no one but her husband. She was becoming dowdyish in appearance and sluggish in action. The breakfast-bell would ring, and he would sit over the library-fire full fifteen minutes before she would make her appearance in response to it. And when she did come, how did she look? Listless and moping, she would take her place behind the teatray with a yawn, pour out his coffee as if the task of lifting the coffeepot was almost too great for her feeble arm, and then sit there with hardly a word during the whole meal. Curse it, if one of those foreign jackanapes with his waxed moustache were sitting opposite her, she would find plenty to say! Was this married life? was this the nearest approach to domestic happiness he was ever to know? Wouldn't things improve if he was to show her right now that he would not have any of her fine-lady airs? Wouldn't it be best to go right back home and lay down the law to her, and tell her in plain English that he intended to be master? Yes, he thought it would. Should he do it to-day or wait until a fresh provocation should give him occasion? At Beechland he decided in favor of to-day. When he got back to Aland and met his wife's icy-cold stare, he decided to wait for fresh provocation.

So things went on for several days, each party maintaining a sort of armed neutrality.

Mrs. Barrow was waiting for some kind of advance from her husband. Mr. Barrow was waiting for a fitting opportunity to assert his mastership over his wife.

The opportunity came, but the advance never did. It was about a week after the cotton-sack episode. Three gentlemen, neighbors and friends of Mr. Barrow's, had ridden over to see him, to compare crops and discuss some matter of local interest. Mr. Barrow detained them to dinner. Mrs. Barrow was notified of the fact. It interested her to the extent of

making her have her hair dressed fashionably by her dexterous maid, and herself arrayed in a handsome dinner costume, but no further.

When dinner was announced, Mrs. Barrow made her appearance, looking superbly, and she received her husband's guests with such graceful elegance that one and all they mentally pronounced Barrow a "lucky fellow."

The dinner was unexceptionable. The turtle-soup was perfect. The fresh fish, just caught in time for dinner, was sans reproche. The various courses were triumphs of culinary skill, aided by dainty serving. The wine that Mr. Barrow pressed so freely upon his guests was a glowing advertisement for Monsieur Verzenay. In fact, there was but one thing that was not as it should have been. That one thing was the vinegar-cruet. The vinegar-cruet instead of being full was empty! Mr. Barrow's right-hand guest put out his hand confidently toward the richly-carved silver castor, lifted the cut-glass cruets from its socket, saw that it was innocent of the desired acid, and replaced it furtively and quickly, glancing around to make sure that no one had noticed his discomfiture.

Mr. Barrow caught the action, and glanced savagely toward his handsome wife, who was so absorbed in a chat about Paris with her right-hand guest that she was entirely oblivious of such vulgar things as vinegar-cruets. Presently Mr. Barrow's left-hand guest was seized with an indiscreet desire to vinegar something on his plate. Rashly his hand sought the fatal castor. Quickly it was withdrawn, and this second victim of misplaced confidence bent over his plate, looking as confused as if caught in petty larceny. The watchful Mr. Barrow had seen this, too. Forbearance was no longer a virtue.

This time he reached forth, and, taking the luckless cruets in his hand, he turned to the boy in waiting, and, addressing him in a loud, coarse voice, desired him to ask Mrs. Barrow if she would please give her house-

keeper orders to fill the castors hereafter previous to meals instead of during that period.

Mrs. Barrow's fashion chit-chat was brought to a sudden stop. Her husband's voice sounded so unnaturally loud, owing to the combined effect of passion and wine, that she was startled. Her first thought was: "The brute, to insult me before a whole tableful!" Her second was: "He don't sleep this night without asking my pardon for it." Aloud she turned to the frightened waiting-boy, and commanded him, in a voice of the quietest dignity, to fill the cruets and try and be a little more thoughtful next time.

"She is a lady," thought the three guests. "He is an ill-bred savage," thought the same three knowing ones.

The dinner came to an end, much to the relief of the two disappointed applicants for vinegar, who felt unconscionably guilty, and were in a frame of mind to forswear that appetizing condiment forever. Mrs. Barrow remained seated at the head of her table, waiting until Mr. Barrow should have conducted his guests into the smoking-room. She proposed, as soon as they were safely out of hearing, to open her vials of wrath upon the helpless head of Gus, the waiting-boy. He had just left the room with a tray full of dirty dishes, and she was waiting for his return, when, somewhat to her surprise, the door opened and her husband re-entered the room.

If Mr. Barrow had not been secretly waiting for an opportunity to assert his authority over his wife, I think the incident of the empty cruets might have been passed over with a few cross words for her negligence and a sharp reprimand to Gus; but as he was watching his opportunity, this one was just as good as another; besides, he was buoyed up by fictitious courage borrowed from the wine-bottle. He walked straight up to the dinner-table, took the handsome cut-glass cruets one by one from their sockets, dashed them one by one against the marble mantel-piece; then, turning round

upon the hearth, he planted himself, with his hands behind him, and fixed his angry, bloodshot eyes upon his wife's face.

I think if Agnes had shown one sign of weakness at this juncture, had looked frightened or burst into tears, her husband would have felt ashamed of himself,—would, in all probability, have gone up to her, put his arms around her neck, have called himself a brute, and begged her pardon then and there. But she was not in the least frightened, and had no notion of shedding a solitary tear. Her first words only added fuel to the flame.

“Quite a gentlemanly display of strength and temper.” And she returned his angry glance with a look of such cold and steady defiance that it roused her husband to perfect frenzy.

“Curse your coolness, madam, do you think I married you for nothing else than the privilege of seeing you dress and bedizen yourself for the benefit of other men? Are my wishes and my comfort to be of no earthly importance in my own house? Do you think I am going to be such a cursed fool as to let any woman living walk over me rough-shod, as you are attempting to do? No, madam, I want you distinctly to understand that I am master here, and I expect you to recognize that fact as entirely as every one else about these premises!”

He paused and looked at his wife to see what effect this manly declaration of independence was producing upon her. The charm was certainly not working as he had hoped it would. Instead of seeing a penitent, cowed woman, ready to beg his pardon for the past and promise amendment for the future, there confronted him a flashing creature, with eyes full of defiance and lips curling with scorn.

“Have you done?” she asked, as he paused in his philippic.

“I am done, madam, if you think you understand that from this time I expect my requests to be re-

garded as commands,—my desires to be considered your duties.”

“Your commands, sir, you will make known to your slaves, among which I do not number myself. Your desires, from this out, will certainly be of much less weight with me than formerly. I was fully aware, when I married you, that I did not love you to any burdensome extent; but I believed that I was marrying a gentleman, and hoped to be able to respect him. You have proven to me to-day that I was mistaken in my belief, and you have rendered it utterly impossible for me ever to respect you. As for the cause of this present outburst, I regret that as much as you do, for it reflected discredit upon my housekeeping. You need never have feared a recurrence of it; but I think you could have found some more gentlemanly way of expressing your displeasure. And now, unless you wish our guests to be made aware of the fact that Mr. and Mrs. Barrow have taken to downright quarreling, I think you had better return to them.”

So this was the end of his proclamation! He had informed his wife loudly and decisively that he was her master, and she had informed him, in return, that she was sorry to discover that he was no gentleman, and had coolly advised him to return to the smoking-room. He had expected contrition, tears, and penitence, in which case he was prepared to become instantaneously forgiving and affectionate. He was met by sneers, defiance, and advice.

Who was conquered?

She certainly was not. He as certainly was not. That piece of advice about his guests was, however, worth listening to. He would follow it. One word more, though, he would say,—

“Agnes, are you not sorry?”

“Sorry?” she looked at him in unfeigned surprise. “Yes, I am sorry, exceedingly sorry,” she went on, “that this assertion of your marital authority should have involved the breakage of my handsome cruets.

I hope you will replace them as soon as possible. Gus, clear away that broken glass."

Who was conquered?

She certainly was not. Was he?

He really did not know himself.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE INFANTRY DEPLOYS UPON THE FIELD.

CHAPTER thirteen is dedicated almost exclusively to the introduction of a new set of personages,—little ladies and gentlemen who are destined to be the real heroes and heroines of my story.

Within a few months after the unhappy altercation described in the last chapter, an altercation which had only resulted in increased coldness on the wife's part, and increased harshness on the husband's, Mrs. Barrow gave birth to a son.

When Dr. Lombard came out of his sister-in-law's room and informed Mr. Barrow that he was the father of a fine boy, the young man's heart beat fast with love and pride, and in his new-found joy he longed to clear up matters between his wife and himself. The mother of his son was doubly dear.

"Can I go in, doctor?" he asked, eagerly.

"Yes; but don't find too much to say, for Agnes is very weak."

When Otis stepped within the darkened chamber and heard the heavy, labored breathing of his sick wife, his naturally kind heart smote him for every harsh word he had ever spoken to the woman who lay there so white and wan, looking so helpless in her weakness. He trod softly, until he stood by her side, then he gazed down upon her pale face and closed lids with

a heart full of the old love. He was seized with a yearning desire to take her into his arms and beg her to help him make their married life happier in the future.

For their child's sake, he would beg her to let by-gones be by-gones. If she would only try to love him a little, they might get along so much better.

He wondered if she was very ill. To him, the physically strong man, whose life-pulses were bounding so vigorously, who had never known a day's sickness, this weakness and stillness looked like death. How changed she seemed! Could that be the radiant creature, who, not a twelvemonth ago, dazzled with her glorious beauty wherever he had taken her? would she ever again look as she had looked then? Had he been very harsh with her? Shouldn't he have remembered her situation, and not have asked anything of her until this crisis had passed? But he had had so little conception of what a trial it was going to be for her, poor thing. What did he know, in his man's ignorance, of the grand mystery and mortal agony of woman's travail? Why had not his wife some time talked to him about their common hope and common expectation? Why not have given him the right to cheer and aid her, as far as loving sympathy could cheer and aid her in her coming peril? It was all so dark, and still, and death-like in the sick-room, nothing breaking the silence but the slow, measured breathing of his sick wife, that before she awakened he had passed from awe and wonderment into remorse and pity, then into love and longing.

He had stood motionless by her bedside fully five minutes, when she opened her languid eyes and raised them to his face.

Remember that she knew nothing of what was passing and had passed through her husband's mind, as he stood watching her; if she had, her greeting might have been a degree less indifferent.

"You here?" she asked, in a weary voice. "Have

you seen it? Come on the other side of the bed. What do you want to name him?"

There was no pride, no joy, in her voice as she spoke of "it." She simply pointed to a bundle of wraps that lay upon the bed beside her, and having asked her one question, relative to the naming of the child, she closed her eyes wearily.

Without replying to her question, Mr. Barrow stooped and pressed a kiss on her pale forehead.

"Wife," he began, speaking in a low and earnest voice, "I want to say a few words to you before you go to sleep again. I've been standing here looking down on your poor, white face till all the man that's in me has raised up to reproach me with every harsh word I've spoken to you, while you were waiting for your trouble to come on you. Women have a deuced hard time of it in this world, if men would only try to bear it in mind; and I beg your pardon, Aggie, for everything I've done to make yours harder. We have a child to love and to raise now, wife, and though I'm but a coarse fellow at the best, I think, if we both try to make things work a little smoother, it will be better for you and for me, and for the little man yonder, too. It sha'n't be my fault, Aggie, if we don't; for as I stand here by you, God knows that there is nothing in my heart but regret for the past, love for you and our boy in the present, and earnest desire for the happiness of our united lives in the future."

He paused, waiting for her answer, hoping it would be a response. It was short and cold enough when it did come. Becky was there. She had come over to stand by her sister in the hour of her trial. She was sitting at the opposite side of the room, sewing on some mysterious garment that the young heir of Aland was in immediate need of. She had heard every word her brother-in-law said, and the tears had come into her eyes at his earnest pleading. She held her breath now for her sister's answer.

After what Mr. Barrow had said, meaning it so

thoroughly, as was evident, Agnes would have no one but herself to thank if she was not happy in the future.

"Thank you, Mr. Barrow," said his wife in reply. "I am sure it is not my desire that we should be always bickering; but, Mr. Barrow, let me ask one favor of you."

"Certainly, my dear wife." And her husband bent forward, eagerly, to hear what he could do for her. In his repentant mood, he hoped it was some very great favor she was going to ask. Something very difficult of performance, just not impossible, so that by granting it he could prove how thoroughly in earnest he was.

"Please don't use that word 'deuced,'—it is so coarse."

"Is that the favor?"

"Yes."

Mr. Barrow straightened himself up with a little nervous laugh.

Sick as Agnes was, Becky could have taken her by the two shoulders and shaken her well.

"I had better look at the boy and leave," was Mr. Barrow's next remark. "Lombard told me not to talk too much."

Becky came forward at this juncture to act as amateur showman. She laid back wrap after wrap, until she revealed to the young father's astonished vision the smallest thing in the human shape that he had ever laid eyes upon, possessing a very red and very wrinkled face, in fact, such a crabbed-looking little face that it might have belonged to a little old man of eighty, a small, round head covered with a heavy suit of dark hair, and a pair of eyes closed so tightly that the lids were in a perfect pucker. Otis gazed in wonder. That funny little old-man-looking thing was his son! He turned to Becky in all innocence and ignorance, and ventured on one inquiry:

"How many days before its eyes will be open?"

Becky looked at him in amazement and disgust.

"Go," she said, giving him a push. "I agree with my husband. You'd better not talk too much. Mr. Barrow, this is not a *puppy*, it is a *boy*!"

The new-made father made his exit from the room, covered with infamy.

After having closed the door upon him, Mrs. Lombard resumed her seat and her sewing. She heaved a deep sigh as she glanced at the sick woman, and wished from the bottom of her heart that Agnes and Otis were as happy as herself and Dr. Lombard. There had been very little romance in their wooing or their wedding. But there had been just as little calculation or deception. Her life was passed in a happy, tranquil round of home joys and home duties,—Dr. Lombard and the old major finding their most exciting interest in the never-ceasing warfare of the chess-table. Then there was a great event in store for Tanglewood, too,—an event that was being looked forward to by a proudly-expectant husband as well as a happy wife. It was this that made Becky so sorry for the young couple at Aland. God sends these little angel-messengers to rivet the links of the love-chain that girdles true hearts in true homes, and Otis seemed to greet the heaven-sent messenger aright; but Agnes,—ah, Agnes!—has she a heart? asked Becky, of herself. Has she no feeling for her husband? Why could she not have met his advance in the spirit in which it was intended? So Becky sat and worried, but could do not one earthly thing toward mending matters in her sister's unhappy home.

* * * * *

Ralph was the name finally decided on in family conclave, so as "Ralph" young master Barrow was entered upon the record of the family Bible.

This new actor upon the stage was about three months old when Mr. Barrow received the following letter from his cousin, Paul Winchester:

"MY DEAR OLD OTIS,—I expect you think I treated the announcement of your boy's birth very cavalierly, but events have been crowding so fast and thick upon me in the last six months that I have positively had no time for writing.

"Before I proceed to a detailed account of what those events are, let me offer you my most hearty congratulations, dear old boy, and you will please present the same with my friendliest regards to Mrs. Barrow. You will please, also, return the same by mail, as I am writing this to you within twenty-four hours after the birth of my own boy. Tell Mrs. Barrow that Mrs. Winchester says she is 'dying' to become acquainted with her and compare babies. I would have liked to have named the young one for you, but Jeannie pleaded for 'Charles,' as having been her father's name, so Charles it is, or rather Charlie it will be when it becomes enough of a human to demand an appellation.

"Now to less important items than the advent of the two young editions of our two old selves. I am going to astonish you, Ote, by a piece of news far more wonderful than the every-day occurrence of a baby's appearance on the stage. I am a rich man and a gentleman of leisure! At least Jeannie thinks I ought to be a gentleman of leisure; but I cling to my office and shingle as the last faint struggle of independence on the part of a man who used to flatter himself he was going to do great things; but 'there is a destiny that shapes our ends,' etc., — you know the rest. Well, about two months after you were married, I had settled myself comfortably in this goodly town of P——, and was looking forward in a Micawberish frame of mind, not finding time hang heavily, for I still kept reading law pretty industriously.

"I had very comfortable lodgings in a private boarding-house. I will always think my good angel directed me to that house, Otis, for there I found my little wife. It won't do for a man to boast of his own possessions, but I wish you knew her, Otis. She is

just the brightest, prettiest, most winsome thing that God ever sent upon earth for the blessing of one man and the confusion of many. She was lonely and unhappy when I first became acquainted with her, and it was not until after we had been married long enough for her to forget all her past trouble, that I knew myself what a sunbeam I had caught.

“Now to the Arabian Nights’ part of my story. Boarding in the same house with us was a very rich and very lonely old lady by the name of Crouch. She was ever so rich, but preferred boarding with Mrs. Walker (who was an old-time friend of hers) to living in her own big old house and be cheated and worried out of her life by hirelings.

“About a month after my marriage, Mrs. Walker had the misfortune to lose her house by fire. I must confess that after I had carried my precious little wife to a safe place I had no particular object in returning to the scene of the fire save one of common humanity; but, as I was starting back, Jeannie called after me in a perfect agony of fear to save poor old Mrs. Crouch; she knew nobody would be thinking of the old lady. I tore back to the burning house. Everything, of course, was in the wildest confusion. Where was old Mrs. Crouch? Nobody knew. She had been forgotten by everybody. Well, to make a long story short, I contrived to rescue the old lady from what would certainly have been her grave in a very few moments. I conveyed her, half dead from fright, to the house where I had left my wife. We were all kindly taken care of there for the night, and the next day Mrs. Crouch proposed that we should accompany her to her own home, the house she had closed up on account of her own gloom and loneliness. We consented to accept her hospitality, temporarily. After we had been with her about two weeks, I told her one day that I had succeeded in finding an excellent boarding-house. She turned round on me in a genuine fury, and said: ‘Just because she was so happy with

Jeannie I was determined to separate them. Said that she had got to loving Jeannie like a child, and what would become of her if we went away and left her alone in that old barn. Besides that, she never had got over the fright of that fire, and never would. She didn't know at what moment she might be taken very ill, and not a friend near her. It was barbarous. Then look at Jeannie's face: ever since she had had the great old garden to run loose in, the color had been brightening in her cheeks until she was a perfect picture to look at.' So the old lady went on until it ended in our staying. She proved to be right about the shock to her nervous system, for before we had been living with her a month, the poor old soul was taken very ill,—a low, nervous fever, the doctors called it. My wife nursed her like an angel, but we couldn't bring her round, and after laying in bed six weeks, she died peacefully and calmly, with her head resting on Jeannie's shoulder.

"It was as great a surprise to us as to anybody, when her will came to be read, to hear that she had left everything to my wife and me. She had no relatives, and she had originally disposed of her property in public charities; but she altered her intentions after the fire, and the wording of the new will read: I leave everything that I am possessed of to the man who saved my life and to his wife, who has been more than a daughter to me ever since that frightful night.

"So now, old boy, you have a full explanation of how I became a rich man by the merest accident.

"Jeannie bids me write that our house is full big, and she would be so happy to have you come on with your wife and boy this summer.

"May I hope that you will accept her invitation? You know full well how much pleasure it would give me to clasp hands with you once more.

"As in the olden time,

"Your friend and cousin,

"P. WINCHESTER."

This letter was read by both Mr. and Mrs. Barrow.

Agnes winced slightly at the eulogiums Paul lavished upon his sweet young wife. She astonished her husband by making a proposal :

"Let us accept Mrs. Winchester's invitation."

"With all my heart," responded Otis.

The months moved on, converting the little, red, wrinkled, wizened-faced baby that had been such a puzzle to its father into a white, plump, bright-eyed boy, that was rapidly becoming the light of Otis Barrow's eyes, when the crowning blessing was sent into the modest little home at Tanglewood.

Becky was a little disappointed that a brown-eyed girl was her portion, but her heart was too full of thankfulness to murmur. She called her little one Bertha. In two years from that time Mrs. Barrow gave birth to a daughter.

It is with these four children that our story is to deal principally.

And now, my little mariners, I have fairly launched you upon life's troubled stream. Whether your tiny barks are pre-ordained to fair winds and smooth waters, remains yet to be seen. Whether in the storms that may betide you they are destined to ride the waves of adverse fate triumphantly, or doomed to sink beneath the shock, is still in the womb of time.

CHAPTER XIV.

MATRIMONIAL COGITATIONS.

TEN years had flown rapidly or rolled heavily along (according to the different ideas on that subject entertained by each individual human atom) since little Ralph Barrow had come into this world to inherit his father's property and gladden his father's heart; to "worry his mother's existence out of her, and make her look a thousand years old;" to afford old Dora a renewed chance of displaying her skill as nurse and child-spoiler, as well as otherwise to fulfill the unknown destiny apportioned him by fate.

So far fate's decrees had not been such as to provoke any great outcry or remonstrance on the part of the young gentleman. Barring an occasional and spasmodic display of maternal discipline, things had gone very smoothly indeed. His father was all that was kind and indulgent, ever ready to gratify any wish his boy might express. Old Dora was at once his loving tyrant and tyrannical slave. His ponies and dogs were the perfection of boyish possessions; and Helen, the little sister two years younger than himself, had just enough of the hoyden in her to make her a very desirable companion in his boy plays. On the whole, Mr. Ralph Barrow's chubby, handsome little face was seldom ever disfigured by a frown, or his bright, honest eyes dimmed by a tear.

Helen, as I have told you, was vivacious to the border of hoydenism. She was a little, bright, skipping, jumping, pug-nosed piece of mortality, who made more work in the house in an hour than a dozen ordinary children could have made in a day. Who outraged her lady mother continually by her supreme contempt

for fine clothes and total disregard to her general appearance. Who thought it much "nicer" to pull off her shoes and stockings and go wading in the lake with "Ralphy," than to be dressed up in ribbons and flounces and take a ride with mamma. Who promised, indeed, at the early age of eight, to be "perfectly incorrigible," as Mrs. Barrow informed Mrs. Lombard with a sigh of despair. Then Aunt Becky would smile at the poor little incorrigible, and smooth her rumpled hair, and press upon her rosy lips a kiss far tenderer and fonder than the wild little thing ever received from her mother, whose lips, alas, were far more prone to words of fault-finding and scolding and bitterness than to giving caresses.

Ten years had flown since Otis Barrow had stood beside his wife's sick-bed and been smitten by remorse at the sight of her pale face into expressing his regret for past grievances, and his earnest desire for their future happiness.

With what result?

The man had really meant what he said, and only asked to be met half-way. But Agnes Barrow had no heart, and, therefore, she could not respond to words dictated by another heart. The language of the emotions was dead letter to her. She had married Mr. Barrow for his money, and if she had had it to do over again she would do just as she had done. She had no sentimental aspirations after true homes and united hearts, etc. She was very well satisfied with things as they were. She was the richest woman in the neighborhood. Her silver, her servants, her horses, her equipages were given up to be beyond comparison. She was happy enough. What did a little matrimonial spat now and then amount to? All married people quarreled, she supposed. True, Mr. Barrow did not love her half as well as he did when they were first married. But what husband *did* after ten years of the inevitably disenchanting influence of daily association? It was very natural that he should have transferred all

his affection to his children. For her part, she was very glad he had, for it saved her a world of trouble with the noisy little things, besides keeping him in a good humor and leaving him less time for prowling around the house in search of cobwebs and dusty corners, and other like domestic bugaboos. She supposed there were happier homes than hers. In fact, she knew there were, for there was Becky and Dr. Lombard (but then they were perfectly ridiculous); but she presumed there were quite as many just as bad and a few even worse than her own. She had only one trouble. Mr. Barrow drank so much lately. It made his nose so red and his voice so loud. If it wasn't for those two disagreeable little consequents she shouldn't in the least mind it, for he was always perfectly good-natured when under the influence of liquor. She could do anything she pleased with him at such times. In fact, it was decidedly the most propitious moment for asking favors of him. This was Mrs. Barrow's view of her home-life and its attendant responsibilities after twelve years of married life.

Mr. Barrow was not quite so complacent. His marriage had been a great mistake. His home-life was a decided failure. He had married this woman, loving her, and desiring honestly to make her happy. She had shown him very plainly that she had married him for his money, and that whether he was happy or not was a matter of the very smallest possible importance to her. After the birth of their child he had wished, for its sake, that all bickerings should cease. But it takes two to make connubial harmony. He had met with no assistance from his cold-hearted wife, so discord had remained triumphant in his home. He had long since ceased even to try and love his wife. He knew her, at last, for what she really was,—a shallow, vain, heartless woman, whose one ambition was to outshine all with whom she came in contact, and who had not even the grace to feel thankful to the man who afforded her the means of so doing. Since his children



had been born he had not wanted for loving companionship ; but in the long, dull evenings, when their tired little limbs were laid to rest, after the day's active enjoyment, when their bright eyes were closed in early and peaceful slumber, the disappointed man found the hours wearisome in the extreme. He had no one to talk to, for there were so few subjects that he and his wife agreed upon, that let the topic be what it might, it was almost sure to wind up in an altercation. Then, again, he was not a man who could find solace for the present by burying himself in musty tomes belonging to the past,—so beyond his daily newspaper his reading rarely ever extended. There were but two resources left,—smoking and drinking. He generally retired to the library as soon as the children had kissed him good-night, and there, with his feet on the fender, his cigar-stand and decanter of brandy on a table close at hand, he would sit far on into the night,—smoking and drinking brandy-and-water, and brooding and making his nose red !

Brooding over his wrongs and disappointments, until he had convinced himself that there never was so good a man as Otis Barrow so abominably ill used before ; nor so wicked a woman as Agnes Barrow who had such unmerited blessings showered upon her guilty head. She was enough to drive a man mad. Any man but himself would have committed suicide long ago. He didn't know but what it would be the best thing he could do, anyhow. He would punish her with remorse, if he couldn't touch her in any other way. Yes, he thought he'd do it. But, then, the little man and Helen, poor little scamps, he wouldn't like to leave them with *nobody* to love them or pet them. He'd wait. He'd think about it. He'd take another glass on it. His brooding cogitations would be interrupted long enough for the mixing and drinking of another glass of brandy-and-water. Then the master of Aland would lay back in his easy-chair, not brooding, not even thinking,—simply tasting, breath-

ing, existing. Presently, as the brandy-and-water in its "realistic" form passes from the palate into an "idealistic" form within Mr. Otis Barrow's brain, mental labor is resumed. Under a changed aspect, however, entirely owing, you will perceive, to the "realistic" and "idealistic:"

This world was a very good world in its way if people would only think so. Where in the devil was the use of fretting and fuming through life, howling and whining like a whipped hound? True, he might have found a more domestic wife. But he supposed it was all a lottery. He supposed there *were* men in the world worse off than himself in a connubial way. D—n it, if Agnes would only be half civil, they'd get along well enough! He believed he'd talk to her. Not scold—devil a thing did he gain by that. Somehow or other she always came off victor. He'd pet her a little. Yes—he'd go pet her some. He wanted something to pet, and the chicks were in bed. This was a very good world. A very good world, indeed, sir. And—a—that was devilish good brandy. Very good brandy, indeed, sir. Very good world, sir. Very good brandy—sir—very good-night, sir. Very.

So much for the combined effects of three tumblers of brandy-and-water and—Agnes Snowe.

CHAPTER XV.

A LONG GOOD-BY.

ACROSS the lake, at Tanglewood, life glided along quietly and peacefully. Not quite so quietly as in the olden time, for there was a small element of noise and merriment in the little person of Bertha Lombard that prevented folks from stagnating in the old house.

She was a very pretty child, with soft, dark eyes like her father's; and all her Cousin Helen's rich dresses and flowing ribbons could not hide the fact that plain Becky was being compensated for her own youthful shortcomings in the beauty of her daughter, while the beautiful Agnes was being punished (maybe) for having bartered her beautiful face in having a decidedly plain-looking child. If the mother had only been as philosophically indifferent to this fact as Helen herself, there would have been no heart-burning.

But Mrs. Barrow resented the fact of Bertha's beauty, and what was worse, she was not wise enough to conceal her resentment. She was cold, almost to harshness, to her poor, little brown-eyed niece, so that Bertha never went to Aland unless forced to do so by her mother's express command. "She was afraid of Aunt Agnes," she would plead. "Aunt Agnes looked at her as if she had been naughty. She couldn't have any fun where aunt was."

On the contrary, nothing delighted the youthful heir and heiress of Aland more than a visit to Aunt Rebecca.

"Aunt Becky did have *such* nice things to eat, and she let 'em do just what they pleased, so it wasn't somethin' real down bad," Ralphy would explain.

"And then, mamma," Helen would exclaim, her face beaming with the light of remembered joys, "we does

have *such* fun knocking down dirt-daubers' nests and picking out the little worms for Cousin Berthy's little chickens."

"Picking worms out! knocking dirt-daubers' nests down!" Mrs. Barrow would cry with horror.

"Oh, yes, mamma!" the "incurable" would continue, in an explanatory voice, "and the little chickens does love 'em so much." And she would bring her two chubby hands together with a gesture indicative of intense enjoyment.

"And the spiders," Ralph would add, by way of jogging his sister's memory.

"Oh, yes, mamma! we gets our laps right full of little spiders and bugs, and we goes round the dinin'-room and slaps the flies with wet dish-rags, and gives 'em all to Cousin Berthy's little ducks. Oh, mamma! they do waddle so funny. Mamma, please mam, let me have some little chickens and little ducks, like Berthy. Berthy does have so much fun." And the bright little face would grow pleading in its earnestness.

"Come here, Helen," Mrs. Barrow would say, in her loftiest manner. "What with your worms and spiders and bugs, I suppose that beautiful plaid will have to be thrown away." And she would take up the skirt of the little dress in her maternal fingers, and fix her maternal glance upon the small offender's face in severe condemnation.

"Oh, no, mamma, 'taint spoilt; Aunt Becky always takes off my dress and sash and puts one of Berthy's dark ones on and a white apron, and then I can play so nice. I hate that old sash, mamma! Please, mam, make me some dresses like Berthy's; her's can wash, and she don't have to be always thinking about the dirt. Mamma, *may* I have some chickens?"

If Mr. Barrow was present during the dialogue, the chickens were promised and the little heart made glad. If not, she was told to "hush talking nonsense and leave the room," which she was pretty apt to do, look-

ing as sulky as it was in her bright little nature to look.

But I have wandered back to the Barrows without in the least intending it.

The child Bertha was blessed above her poor, little rich cousins in another respect. Where they had but one heart that loved them to divide between the two, Bertha had three hearts brimful of love all for her own.

She was loved and petted enough for a dozen children by her father and mother, to say nothing of her grandfather, who was never happy unless he could see her face or hear her voice. For her sake he seemed to have burnished up the half-forgotten lore of earlier and brighter days, and hour after hour would the old gray-haired man sit in one sunny spot in the gallery, with the child on his lap, one wrinkled hand clasping her small white one, while the other wandered in tremulous fondness through her clustering curls, telling story after story, until the little head would droop under the mesmeric touch, and the lids close softly over the lovely brown eyes, and Bertha would be asleep. Then the old man would kiss the closed lids, and call somebody softly to come lay his pet down; and the somebody who came would generally be Becky, who would lift the limber little form in her strong, loving clasp, and lay it tenderly down in its little bed, and then she, too, would stoop and kiss the sweet lips before turning away. So love and caresses followed Bertha Lombard through all her early life.

* * * * *

It was about this period, late in the fall of the year that Ralph Barrow saw his tenth birthday, that business called Mr. Barrow to New Orleans.

He announced at the breakfast-table, one morning, that he would have to go down in a day or two from that time.

"How long will you be in the city?" asked Mrs. Barrow, mentally resolving that she would go too.

“It is impossible to say ; probably over two weeks.”

Nothing more was said at that time ; but that night, *after* Mr. Barrow's third tumbler, Mrs. Barrow entered the library, looking very amiable, and before she came out of it her husband had promised to take her with him.

The next morning the children were informed that they were to spend two weeks with Bertha, and were to be very good while mamma and papa were gone, and Helen was further informed that she was to be allowed to take her doll with her,—the doll that Aunt Julia Verzenay had sent all the way from Paris. But the pug-nose took a contemptuously upward curve at this proposition.

“That big, old thing ! It wasn't made to play with. Berthy had the nicest kind of dolls. She didn't want to take *hers* over there.”

“Oh, Ralphy !” she exclaimed, in an ecstasy, “two whole weeks at the dirt-daubers ; just to think !”

“An' nobody to scold a feller 'cause his nails are black,” rejoined Ralphy, whose offenses in that line were very black indeed.

From all of which you will infer that “home, sweet home” was not “the dearest spot on earth” to the two young Barrows, who furthermore entertained the highly heretical desire to inform the tedious individual who so querulously inquired, “What is home without a mother ?” that home, without their mother, might be a very jolly place indeed.

The day before the one fixed for their departure, Mr. Barrow himself took the two children to Tanglewood, where he knew they were always very welcome, and informed Mrs. Lombard of his desire to leave them with her until his return.

“I would like to have taken them with me,” he said, in conclusion, “but Mrs. Barrow seems to think it will spoil her trip entirely.”

“Oh, they will be much happier here with Cousin Bertha and the chickens, and the ducks, won't

they?" asked Aunt Becky, as she untied Helen's hat-strings.

"And the dirt-daubers!" added Mr. Barrow, with an amused laugh.

"Did they tell Aggie that?" inquired Mrs. Lombard, looking as amused as Mr. Barrow.

"Yes," said Miss Helen, not waiting for her father to answer, "and mamma was mad; but, then, mamma's always mad 'bout somethin'."

"Helen!" said her aunt, reprovingly.

Then the child looked ashamed, as she always did when Aunt Becky said "Helen" so solemnly.

Mr. Barrow stayed until it was quite dark, talking with the old major and Dr. Lombard. Then he called Ralph and Helen to him, and kissed them repeatedly by way of saying good-by. His last kiss was given to Helen. He put his arms around his little daughter and kissed her upon the eyes, the cheeks, the lips. Then he went away quickly.

"Aunt," said Helen, turning wonderingly to Mrs. Lombard, "what made papa tell me such a long good-by?"

Mrs. Lombard laughed a little meaningless laugh, as people laugh when they don't know what else to do, and told Helen it was time for her and Bertha to go to bed, which is where children pretty generally are sent if they chance to ask one of their unanswerable questions at or near bedtime. Becky couldn't answer her little niece, so she packed her off to bed.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAST ALTERCATION.

THE business which had called Mr. Barrow to New Orleans had been satisfactorily settled, and he was ready to return to Aland at the end of eight days from the time he had left it.

As usual, Mrs. Barrow's wishes failed to coincide with those of her husband.

"Start home to-morrow, when Faust is to be played the night after? Impossible, Mr. Barrow. I may never have an opportunity of hearing it again rendered by so fine a troupe. I *must* stay."

"Agnes, do you know that I feel far from well? Do you know that the chill I had the other night while you were at Mrs. Hunt's reception bordered so closely upon a congestive chill that I should not care to have another like it?"

"The idea, Mr. Barrow, of a swamper making such an ado over a chill! You were by yourself the other night, and felt a little nervous, I suppose. If you had gone with me, as I wished you to do, you would not have noticed the chill. But you need not have another. You can take medicine all to-day and stay in bed all to-morrow. I *must* hear Faust, Mr. Barrow. Moreover, I have had no chance to wear my black velvet yet, and if I don't wear it to the opera on Thursday, I may as well not have had it made."

"Excellent and unanswerable reasons, madam, for prolonging our stay," replied her husband, bitterly.

"There's no use getting cross about it. I am certain if you hated that plantation as badly as I do, you would be in no such great hurry to get back there."

"You seem to lose sight of the fact that if it were

not for that 'hateful plantation,' you would be minus the black velvet that it is of such vital importance you should wear to the opera."

"You are one of the few wealthy men of my acquaintance, Mr. Barrow, who absolutely hates to see his wife dressing well," retorted the lady, growing irrelevant, after the fashion of most angry women.

Mr. Barrow seemed disposed not to enter into an argument upon that threadbare subject, so he merely said, by way of closing the altercation, "We leave for home to-morrow, Mrs. Barrow," and left the room.

Left to herself, Agnes burst into a torrent of angry, passionate tears. The idea of being torn away just as the crowning enjoyment of her whole trip was offered her. She had been invited by a select party to accompany them to the opera, and there was a rival beauty to be in the party, a dashing young widow, whom Mrs. Barrow burned to humble. The black velvet had been made with no other object, and now to have to leave the field uncontested, when she was so sure of a glorious victory. It was too hard. No woman ever before had such a brute of a husband. She almost wished he would get sick before to-morrow. Not very sick, you know; not sick enough to hurt; just sick enough to keep him in bed until after she had heard Faust and worn the black velvet and annihilated the little black-eyed widow.

She had all three wishes granted.

The above interchange of amenities had taken place in the hotel room occupied by the Barrows just after Mrs. Barrow had come in from her morning's shopping. She had found her husband lying on the sofa in their room. He had given her the information relative to his determination to start for the plantation the next day, and, after having held his share in the squabble matrimonial, as above recorded, he had left the room, telling his wife curtly that he should expect to find her ready for the four o'clock dinner.

The hour named was an earlier one than Mrs. Bar-

row's ultra-fashionable ideas approved of, but deeming it wise not to provoke her husband any further that day, she rang at once for her hairdresser, and was soon deep in the mysteries of an elaborate dinner toilet.

She was dressed and waiting. Her little jeweled watch informed her that the hour of four had arrived and passed into the time-book of the past by full fifteen minutes, before her usually painfully-punctual husband made his appearance.

When he did come, Mrs. Barrow actually started at his appearance. She remembered with a thrill of guilty remorse her wish that he might be taken sick enough to prevent their return to Aland that week.

His face was livid. His lips were purple and his eyes were bloodshot and feverish. His whole frame was convulsed with the force of the ague that had seized upon him as he was walking upon the streets. He strode to the bed and flung himself heavily upon it.

Mrs. Barrow sprang forward to assist him.

"I am sick," he said, as well as his chattering teeth would permit. "Ring for a man to help you."

Mrs. Barrow rang the bell, and with the assistance of the waiter succeeded in getting her husband comfortably to bed.

There was a wild, frightened look in his eyes that struck her with surprise.

"It is nothing but a chill, Mr. Barrow. You have seen hundreds in your life just as severe as this one without anybody dying."

"Send for a doctor," said the sick man, not seeming to derive any comfort from her words.

"Certainly, if you wish it," said Agnes, with a slight sneer. Then she turned to the waiter and bade him request the proprietor to send her a physician whom he could recommend.

Within twenty minutes from that time there came a slight knock at the door of No. 60, and opening it, Mrs.

Barrow found herself face to face with the strange doctor.

As we are destined to become well acquainted with this gentleman, I will reserve my description of him for another chapter.

"Mrs. Barrow?" he inquired, holding his hat in one hand, as he completed a somewhat obsequious bow.

"It is."

"My name is Reynard, madam. I was informed that my services were required professionally by a Mr. Barrow, in No. 60."

"Ah, you are the physician. Walk in, please; I sent for you at my husband's request, although I am at a loss to account for his unusual alarm when he has seen so many similar attacks in others."

"He is not subject to chills himself, then?" asked the physician, who had by this time advanced to the bedside of the sick man. He seemed to be sleeping heavily.

"No, for a swamper he has managed to keep remarkably clear of them. He has been quite quiet ever since I got him to bed, and seems to be sleeping nicely."

The man of science bent over the bedside and listened attentively to the heavy, labored breathing of the invalid. He did not seem so well satisfied as the wife about his patient's quiet sleeping, for all of a sudden he rose from his stooping posture and rang the bell violently. Then he pulled off his coat as if he were going to work in earnest, and, when the bell was answered, he ordered mustard, and chloroform, and brandy, and such a lot of things all to be brought with lightning speed, that Mrs. Barrow began trembling in vague alarm.

"What is it, doctor?" she asked, in a frightened undertone.

"A congestive chill, madam," answered the physician, looking very grave.

Then, frightened and powerless, Agnes sank upon

the sofa, with the silken robes rustling around her, watching, with eager, scared-looking eyes, every movement of the physician and the waiter as they worked silently and vigorously to restore warmth to her husband's chilled body.

It seemed to her that an eternity had passed when she heard the physician heave a sigh of evident relief, and, glancing at him, she perceived at once that some favorable change had taken place.

"He is better, isn't he?" she asked, approaching the bedside.

"Decided change for the better in the condition of the skin. We will bring him round this time, I think; but another such attack will almost certainly prove fatal."

Agnes returned to her sofa, experiencing a genuine sensation of thankfulness. She did not love her husband; but his having come into her presence in that fearful condition, so immediately after her wicked wish, had frightened her terribly. She was relieved from her remorseful fright now,—the doctor had said he could bring him round. So, after all, things had not turned out so disastrously. She would be very careful that he should not have a return, for the third congestive chill was always fatal. She would nurse Mr. Barrow very carefully; but, of course, now they could not leave before she had heard Faust, and worn her black velvet, and crushed Mrs. Noyes, the little black-eyed widow.

Dr. Reynard was correct. Mr. Barrow did not succumb to this second attack. Before daybreak on Wednesday morning his fever was entirely gone, and he lay quiet and free from all pain, though very much weakened by the severity of the attack.

Of course, in his condition, to start on a journey was out of the question. It was to be expected from the nature of these chills that he should have another attack after one day's intermission. To ward off that attack would be a matter of vital importance. He had

often said, in bitterness of soul, that he had better die, that it would be no hardship to him to leave this world, and a hundred other things, such as we all give utterance to when our souls are dark; but, now that he had been brought face to face with the dread possibility, he recoiled with horror. He did not want to die. His heart yearned lovingly over his little children. He did not want to die and leave them to the tender mercies of their cold-hearted mother, and, ultimately, to a stepfather, who might prove worse than cold-hearted. Of course, Agnes would marry again, and soon, too, for there would not be in her case even the usual amount of regret to keep her from taking unto herself a second husband. This thought hardly cost him a pang. He did not feel bitterly about his possible successor; he did not think he would be an object for anybody's envy. All his thoughts, all his wishes, clustered round his son and daughter. He determined to guard his life carefully. He would not die if he could help it. During the whole of Wednesday Mrs. Barrow remained in close attendance on her husband.

Dr. Reynard had come early in the morning of that day, had pronounced favorably upon the case, and gone away, promising to call in again the succeeding morning.

All day long Mr. Barrow seemed comparatively well.

Thursday morning came; so did Dr. Reynard. Patient reported favorably. Minute directions left with Mrs. Barrow, and promises to return after an early dinner, as the critical time would be that afternoon. At four o'clock that afternoon Mrs. Barrow's heart gave an exultant bound. All danger was passed, and she could go to the opera that night without in the least outraging the proprieties.

By eight o'clock she was arrayed in the black velvet. Diamonds flashed from her neck, her bosom, her hair, and the light of anticipated conquest made her eyes brilliant and flushed her cheeks. She looked gloriously handsome.

She came and stood by her husband's bedside. "You don't mind my going out to-night, Mr. Barrow, do you? You know all danger of another attack is passed, or I shouldn't think of such a thing."

"No, I don't mind," answered Otis, feebly, and turned away from his radiant wife with a sigh full of bitterness.

Then Mrs. Barrow rang the bell, and told the boy who answered it that she would pay him well for staying in the room with her husband until she should return from the opera. Having done which, she considered that she had performed her wifely duty in the most unexceptionable manner.

Her escort called for her in a very few moments, and she was soon whirling toward the opera-house, full of bright anticipations as to how chagrined Mrs. Noyes would be when she and her diamonds and her black velvet flashed upon the scene.

As the door closed upon her stately figure, Otis Barrow turned his face to the wall and groaned in anguish of spirit. And this was his wife,—this soulless creature was his whole dependence in life for loving companionship and domestic happiness! He thought he had sounded the depths of her shallow nature long ere this; but this cruel desertion of him, on his sick-bed, surpassed anything in the way of heartlessness that even she had ever been guilty of. Possibly he was rendered peculiarly morbid and sensitive by physical weakness, else he would not have been so remarkably agitated at what was after all merely a new expression of the old heartlessness.

"Oh, Agnes, Agnes! of what are you made?" he groaned aloud.

"Sick, sir?" asked the attendant, briskly; for he was to be paid to watch the sick man.

"Leave the room!" said Mr. Barrow, bounding up in the bed and glaring fiercely at the man.

"But, sir, the lady," began the attendant, in alarm.

"Curse the lady!" roared the outraged husband. "Do as I tell you."

Tremblingly the man obeyed. He hastened from the room down to the office, where he informed the proprietor that the gentleman in No. 60 was certainly gone crazy, and recommended the sending for Dr. Reynard.

The proprietor mounted the steps to No. 60 himself, to discover how much truth there might be in this statement. As he stood on the outside of the door he heard the inmate of the room raving in the wildest style. He knocked; but receiving no permission to enter, hesitated for a few moments before committing what might be considered an unwarrantable piece of intrusion. As he stood thus irresolute, he heard a heavy fall within the room. He turned the latch quickly, and, entering, found his boarder prone upon the floor, writhing in the most horrible convulsion. He rang the bell furiously, then stooping over the fallen man, he raised him in his arms so that he could breathe more easily. Assistance came soon, and Dr. Reynard was sent for in hot haste.

He came, but shook his head gravely. "May die in it," was his dictum, "or may come out of it to die. Death either way."

He "came out of it" to die.

He looked around him and saw a crowd of strange men-faces. Faces full of curiosity, and nothing more. He was in a strange room,—in a strange place, among strange people.

Where was the woman who had promised to stand by him "in sickness and in health?" Listening to Faust.

His dim eyes wandered over the group of rough faces until they rested upon the physician's. At last there was a face he had seen before. He motioned toward the group of people and then toward the door.

"He wishes you all to leave the room," said the doctor, rightly interpreting the double motion. Mr. Barrow nodded assent, and was left alone with the physician.

"Pen and paper," he said, in a feeble voice, pointing at the same time to a portable writing-desk, belonging to his wife, which stood upon the mantel-piece. The physician brought them.

"Write," said the sick man,—“quick,—to Paul Winchester, P—— County, New York.”

Dr. Reynard wrote the address quickly, in a clear business hand. Then the dying man went on:

"I am dying, Paul,—dying, without a friend near me. Look after my children. See that the laws of Louisiana are fairly administered in their behalf. I ask no better will. Good-by, old friend; pray God you may never know the desolation and the loneliness that are my portion in this the hour of my extremity. And go down on your knees and thank God that Agnes Snowe said 'no' to you, twelve years ago, instead of 'yes.' Signed Otis Barrow."

He paused in his dictation. He fixed an earnest, almost beseeching look upon the doctor's face. He hoped he would contradict him,—that he would tell him he was not dying. But no such comfort came to him. Then the calmness of despair seized upon him.

"That is all," he said, in the most composed voice; for Dr. Reynard glanced up at him, with suspended pen, as if waiting to know what he should write next.

"You will dispatch it for me?" he asked.

"Most certainly, my dear sir. But Mrs. Barrow,—has she been sent for?"

"Stop!" said the dying man, in a voice of more power than the experienced ear of the doctor had ever thought to hear from him again. Then he closed his eyes, his lips moved, and bending eagerly forward, Dr. Reynard caught these murmured words:

"God bless my children! Keep them from harm, and grant that my darling daughter grows up a different woman from her cruel, cruel mother."

As the word "mother" fluttered over the parched lips, the door opened and Mrs. Barrow entered, beam-

ing with the pleasure and excitement of the evening. She had heard nothing of the change in her husband's condition. In a big hotel people have plenty to attend to beside one sick or dying man, and so she stood within the chamber of death without one moment's preparation for the awful presence she was to find there.

"You here, Dr. Reynard? Is Mr. Barrow sick again?" And she came hastily forward, looking strangely out of keeping with the somber reality in her flashing diamonds and sweeping train.

"Mr. Barrow is dying, madam." It was her husband who answered her questions,—answered them in a strange sepulchral voice that was hardly recognizable for his own. He seemed to gather all the waning energy of his fast-fleeting soul for one grand final effort. He fastened his dim eyes upon her, and raised his hand as if about to call down Heaven's fiercest wrath upon her head.

His gaze, his gesture, froze the wretched woman with horror. With a wild shriek she fell upon her knees by his bedside and held out her white and jeweled arms with an imploring gesture.

"Do not curse me! Otis, Otis, have mercy, and do not let the last words you speak to me on earth be words of reproach! I see it all,—I know it all,—all my cruel heartlessness, my shameful abandonment of you on your sick-bed! Otis, do not die. Live, and let me prove how sincerely I repent of all my unkindness."

She gazed into the dying man's face in an agony of terrified remorse.

The trembling hand had fallen upon the bed, and the wild look in his eyes had given place to one of grave and sorrowful pity.

"Poor, weak woman,"—he spoke in a low, feeble voice,—“poor, weak woman, you will suffer enough for a little while. Remorse must be hard to bear, Agnes, but it will inevitably be your portion.”

She bowed her head upon the bed and gave vent to the most womanly tears he had ever seen her shed.

He laid his hand upon the diamond spray that still glittered in the braided coronet upon her brow.

"Ah, Agnes! if you had thought less of these glittering stones and more of your husband's affection, our home would not have been the home it has been. I loved you, Agnes. Your happiness was very near to my heart at one time. But you cared nothing for my love. You turned from it to lavish your smiles and bright looks on strangers. I am dying now, wife, and I know full well that my place will be filled by another man before many years shall pass. I have but one favor to ask. See to it that you give my children an honest man for a stepfather. Their wealth will be a great temptation. Poor little ones,—poor little man, precious little woman! Be kind to them, Agnes. Be kinder, I mean."

He paused from very weakness.

"Otis, say you forgive me. Say that you forgive me this night's unkindness."

"Will that do you any good?" he asked, drearily. "Well—then—yes—I forgive you, Agnes Snowe, forgive you for having married me when you felt not one particle of affection for me. Forgive you for having returned my honest heart-offerings with scorn and contumely. Forgive you for my darkened hearth. Forgive you for my blighted life. Ask God to forgive you, too, Agnes, and with your asking, ask Him to give you a woman's heart."

Strange pardon—that crushed its recipient by a grand summary of all her offenses,—a pardon that sounded strangely like a malediction.

The excitement and the effort to talk had completely exhausted the waning strength of the dying man. He lay motionless. His fading glance fixed upon the starry diadem on his wife's bowed head. Her sobs were the one sound that broke the stillness of the room. Dr. Reynard had stepped to a window in a

distant part of the room, and while apparently gazing down upon the glimmering street-lamps, was eagerly listening to everything that passed between the dying man and his beautiful wife.

* * * * *

A new day was just dawning sad and gray, with its own share of clatter and din and hurry and bustle, with its own burden of new-born hopes and busy plans and little joys and wearing troubles, as the soul of Otis Barrow passed into the presence of its Maker. The soul of many a worse man has passed from earth amid the sound of weeping and wailing and heart-broken sobs.

One frightened, remorseful woman alone stood by this bedside, calling wildly on the fleeting soul for one word of kindness. One word—just one—of full, free pardon. But she pleaded in vain. His last thoughts, his last-murmured words, were all for his absent children:

“My little ones,—bless them,—God take care of them,—my precious ones—my boy—my girl.”

Dr. Reynard proved an invaluable assistant to the widow. He was assiduous in his attentions until after the last rites had been performed for Otis Barrow and she had returned alone to Aland. Dr. Reynard was casting his bread upon the waters.

CHAPTER XVII.

A COUNTERFEIT GENTLEMAN.

DR. REYNARD had proved himself invaluable to Mrs. Barrow in her time of trouble. He had personally superintended the interment of her deceased husband in one of the beautiful cities of the dead that adorn the Crescent City. Had executed her orders re-

specting an imposing monument to be erected above the spot. Had himself written a neat epitaph, accrediting the dead man with such an endless catalogue of virtues that he who read must needs have come to the conclusion that the relict of such a paragon should have been inconsolable for life, whether she was or not. Had called daily at the hotel to know if there was anything he could do for the fair mourner up to the morning on which she had departed for Aland, looking the personification of unmitigable woe in her heavy black bombazine and long crape veil.

She had left a little note for the physician, written on black-edged paper, thanking him for his unparalleled kindness, and adding the hope that she might some day or other be able to show her appreciation of his goodness in some more substantial form than mere words of gratitude. She was gone, and there was nothing left to do in the present but to wait patiently for the future.

Dr. Reynard, or John Reynard, M.D., as his card would inform you, was a young man and an unmarried man. He was what is called in this slipshod country of ours (where manufacture of "self" is the briskest business that is carried on) a self-made man. Taking his home manufacture into consideration, I suppose he would rank middling fair.

The ground-work that nature had furnished for the grand superstructure that John Reynard was forever boastfully flaunting in the faces of men who hadn't made themselves, consisted of a tolerably well-formed person, in stature rather under than over the medium size; feet and hands not noticeable in any way excepting that the nails of the latter might have been kept a little cleaner; complexion of almost Spanish darkness; a heavy suit of straight, black hair; handsome dark eyes, overhung by a pair of remarkably bushy black brows; handsome eyes, but not pleasing in their expression,—eyes that could look straight enough and hard enough at you, but not with the

straightforward, honest look of the man who is perfectly willing for you to look through these "windows of the soul" and search the innermost recesses of a heart guiltless of wrong. It was rather a hard, defiant glance, that courted inspection in the reckless spirit of bravado. As for his mouth, which is my favorite feature and prime helper in character deciphering, nobody could say what kind of mouth he had; for a heavy, dark moustache clothed his upper lip, and his chin was hidden by a little peaked goatee that was always kept trimmed in the latest style, and would have gone a long ways toward making its possessor a brigadier-general if he had been so unfortunate as to have lived in troubled times.

So much for the insignificant item of the physical John Reynard; a handsome man, beyond dispute, but one turned from the contemplation of his good looks with a sense of dissatisfaction. The man's face was repulsive in spite of his fine big eyes and dashing moustache and ready smile. Now for the self that he was so proud of having made. If the honesty of his parents had been as notorious a fact as their poverty I could state with strict veracity that he was "born of poor but honest parents." But I am utterly in the dark as to old Mr. and Mrs. Reynard's moral antecedents; I only know that they were so poor, and their ability to do anything for their offspring was so limited, that at the early age of fourteen young John concluded he could make more by leaving the paternal roof-tree than by clinging to it.

To save bootless discussion and the pain of leave-taking, he kept his plans and resolutions to himself until they were quite ripe for execution, and then carried them into effect with such masterly adroitness and secrecy that he was at least fourteen miles from home, one bright, frosty morning when his poor old mother was standing innocently at the foot of the little ladder leading up into the loft where he and his younger brother slept, raising her querulous old voice

to its most querulous pitch as she repeatedly called, "You John,—you John!" But "you John" was trudging merrily along the crisp, frost-bitten road toward the "city," where he was to make his fortune very speedily and very easily in some way or other. The how was for further consideration. He had reached the city of New Orleans after divers adventures and experiences that it would fill a volume to detail; had knocked about in search of employment until he had chanced into a drug-store, and was so fortunate as to obtain a situation in it as taker-down-of-shutters, sweeper-out-of-floors, and general runner of errands. It was while in this situation that he gave indication of one very necessary trait in the man who intends to make himself. That trait may be described as adhesiveness. He had found a situation. He would cling to that situation until something very positively better should offer. True, the shutters were certainly the very heaviest shutters that shop-boy ever staggered under. And he would pit the floor of his drug-store against the floor of any other store of any kind in the whole city of New Orleans for ability to accumulate the greatest amount of dirt in the shortest given time; still, it was a situation that assured him of food, lodging, and clothing. Young John had a lofty scorn of rolling stones. Young John resolved that he would *not* roll, and that he *would* gather moss. Strict attention to business, unswerving punctuality, and general aptness eventually told in his favor, as it will in everybody else's. He was gradually promoted into a druggist's apprentice, during which period he began studying his profession under his former master. To a naturally very bright mind he added the most dogged determination to succeed. At the end of ten years he was permitted to write M.D. after his name, and was pronounced a "promising young physician, and a rising man."

Arrived at this stage in his career, he found time to think of the old folks at home. His letter to them was

answered by his young brother. The old folks had gone the way of all flesh, and had long ago ceased from troubling. The rising young man sent for the forlorn boy, and took him under his august protection. Then he closed the door on his past life, and lost sight of John the shop-boy forever in admiring contemplation of John Reynard, M.D. He installed his brother in his old berth as a druggist's apprentice. He delivered him a little private oration on the occasion:

"I am giving you a start in the world, James, which is more than anybody ever did for me. I had my own row to hoe, sir, and a devilish long row it was. But here I am, my boy, in a fair way to make a fortune, and nobody to thank but myself. I'm a self-made man, sir, and the secret of my success lies in a nut-shell. I wiped the word 'luck' out of my dictionary, sir. There is no such thing as luck. A man's luck lies in his brain and in his ten fingers, sir; step by step I've mounted the ladder, and although I'm far from the top round yet, I'll be there before my hair is gray, sir; and the same road is open to you, sir. When your heart fails you, look at me, sir, and never say die."

Young James obeyed one portion of this injunction immediately, and looked at his self-made brother in genuine admiration; for the John who had run away from home ten years before, and Dr. Reynard, the young city doctor, had very little in common so far as personal appearance went. John had been a bushy-headed, sullen boy, who had run away from them all in a very bad humor and a pair of faded cottonade pants. Dr. Reynard, who did him the honor of acknowledging the blood-tie between them, was a handsome young man, who wore black broadcloth every day, wore a shiny hat, and put on gloves when he went out on the street! John in gloves!

Moreover, association with men of education had given our self-made man a species of surface polish, a sort of social veneering that did him good service in the class in which he was destined to move as a pro-

fessional man. It is true, he *would* make that much-put-upon pronoun *them* do double duty; and, on one notable occasion, when he rashly ventured upon a classical quotation, he got things into a terrible mud-dle by claiming a close family connection for Cicero and Socrates; but he was too quick-witted thus to commit himself often, and the furtive smile his keen glance caught on the faces of those around him cured him forever of any puerile ambition to seem more erudite than he really was.

He had been practicing his profession in the Crescent City for six years at the time he was called in to attend Mr. Barrow, and although he was acknowledged to be a good physician, he had never yet been able to take his place in the ranks of the old regular faculty. His business was ample for his support; but it was not the kind of practice he desired to establish. He was often tempted to leave the field where there was so many competitors and try a more obscure point. Then his old aversion to rolling stones would return, and he would preach patience to himself,—taking for his text his own favorite maxim,—step by step. Such as he was you have him.

I find I have written quite a lengthy chapter by way of introducing Dr. John Reynard, when I might have disposed of him in one descriptive sentence,—he was a counterfeit gentleman. The glitter of the genuine gold was there. The stamp of the coin seemed true and fair. He would pass current with the unsuspecting million; but if ever he comes to be weighed in the social scales by a “professional,” he will be found wanting. The ring of the true metal was not in him..

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CHAPTER OF COMMENTS.

OTIS BARROW was dead.

The newspapers disposed of him in one short paragraph, which gave to the world the important item that he was born on such a date, and died on such another date, and—nothing more.

The marble-cutter, as he chiseled away on the wordy epitaph, thought it a pity that the world should be deprived of so much worth and goodness, while he rejoiced that the defunct possessor of the same was so "rich a cove" as to demand such a costly specimen in the monumental line.

A knot of men gathered in the office of the deceased Mr. Barrow. Commission merchants discussed his sudden death over their morning cigars, and had decided before the stumps of these same cigars were thrown away, that the ensuing season would see a great many applicants for the dead man's shoes.

The little widow, whose annihilation had been a matter of such vital import to Mrs. Barrow, clasped her hands and thanked God that although it *had* pleased Him to leave her desolate and alone in this wicked world, she had not *one* act of neglect toward her dear, dead Charles with which to reproach herself. "To think she was at the opera while he was actually dying!"

The lucky mantuamaker, who received the newly-made widow's orders for her mourning, gauged the lady's grief by her purse, and piled on crape folds in the most grief-stricken quantity, thanking the good luck that had sent the "poor, heart-broken thing" to her instead of to her rival over the way.

Mrs. Lombard bent in silent sorrow over the letter containing the announcement, and dropped a sisterly

tear to the memory of the dead, as she sighed, "Poor Otis! Agnes did not make him happy. I doubt if he had many regrets at leaving the world."

Two little, childish voices were raised in heart-broken wails that would not be hushed, for "papa was dead, and there was nobody left to love now."

A plantation full of humble, affectionate-hearted slaves gathered in mournful clusters around the cabin-doors sorrowing for him who was gone, and trembling about their own dependent future, for "master was gone, and who was left to care for them now, in sickness and in health? Master was gone, and they'd never get another like him."

For *nine whole* days the world's tongue wagged over the dead man and his affairs, then a fresh wave from the sea of oblivion came rolling onward, washing them toward the shores of the eternal past, and the sun shone, and the birds caroled, and the flowers bloomed, and mortals danced and smiled as unconcernedly as if Otis Barrow, with his disappointed heart and unsatisfied cravings, had never been.

"Where now, ye living vanities of life,
Ye ever-tempting, ever-cheating train,—
Where are ye now, and what is your amount?—
Vexation, disappointment, and remorse."

CHAPTER XIX.

TROUBLE AT TANGLEWOOD.

THE summer succeeding Otis Barrow's demise promised to be an unusually warm and sickly one. Already the alarming rumor that cholera had made its appearance among the blacks was sending consternation to every heart.

Agnes had fully intended showing her deceased hus-

band the respect of staying quietly at home that whole summer; but, as the frightened remorse, which had been the only emotion she had felt from the beginning, began to wear away, the prospect of remaining in retirement on the plantation a whole season grew irksome in the extreme. "Of course," she told herself, "she had no desire whatever to enter into the gayeties of a watering-place; but she would certainly be justified in selecting some quiet, retired spot, and going there with her children."

She thought she would ask Becky's advice about it; then she thought she wouldn't; for Becky would certainly be shocked at the idea of her going anywhere so soon after her husband's death. Besides, was Rebecca her keeper, or the keeper of her conscience? No, she was her own mistress,—her own mistress, and rich! Mrs. Barrow was conscious of a guilty thrill of exultation as she murmured the words to herself. So, quietly, and without saying anything to her relatives over the lake, she began making the usual preparations for her summer flitting.

The rumor of cholera among the blacks soon resolved itself into a dread certainty. It was within four plantations of Aland. It was on the next place. It was at Tanglewood. Dr. Lombard was kept busy day and night. Mrs. Barrow hastened the preparations for her departure. She was to leave within three days. She was about retiring to bed on the night of the day previous to the one appointed for her departure, when old Dora entered her room livid with fright.

"Mistiss, Miss Becky's down!"

"Who says so?" cried Mrs. Barrow, starting from her chair in alarm.

"One o' their boys is just come across to know ef you won't come see Miss Becky. Says she mighty bad off."

"Who sent him?" asked Mrs. Barrow, turning pale.

"Ole Patience," replied Dora.

"Old fool!" exclaimed the lady. "No, I cannot go. I am afraid. I owe it to my children to stay away."

"Mistiss, 'spose she dies?"

"Can I help it if she does?" cried Agnes, turning upon her with flashing eyes.

Old Dora turned to leave the room.

"Stop!" cried Mrs. Barrow. "Go tell the boy I will come—but not now. Early in the morning."

"Cholera don't wait on folks, mistiss."

"Leave the room!" exclaimed Mrs. Barrow, in tones that enforced obedience.

Her slave obeyed her.

By daybreak the next morning a traveling-carriage whirled rapidly through the gates of Aland, and Agnes Barrow sat within, fleeing from the possibility of danger, and turning a deaf ear to the calls of nature.

In the mean time a heavy cloud was settling down over the happy little family at Tanglewood.

When the loathsome disease first made its appearance among the negroes at Tanglewood, Dr. Lombard had striven, but in vain, to prevent all intercourse between the house and quarters; his wife had pleaded so sweetly and earnestly to be allowed to share his danger and fatigue that he had been forced to yield.

"You know, husband," Becky had argued, "that it so seldom attacks the better class,—fright and uncleanliness seem almost essential to its appearance. I do not think I would be in any danger, and our poor, childlike slaves have learned to depend so upon me for help in any time of trouble, that if I stand aloof from them now it will have a most depressing effect."

"But our child, wife? I have to go among them,—it is my duty as a man and a physician; but you——"

"And it is my duty as a mistress and your wife, dearest," she interrupted. "If there is any danger, surely, my husband, it is but right that I should share it with you." And a pair of arms were twined pleadingly around Dr. Lombard's neck, and he was coaxed into permitting his wife to share his labors.

Her presence in the cabins had the most beneficial

effect. She talked to the poor, frightened wretches cheerily and hopefully, exhorted them to cleanliness, and saved many a life by her own active exertions in behalf of the sufferers.

But the ways of Providence are indeed inscrutable. Her humane efforts in behalf of her father's slaves were brought to an abrupt termination. She fell a victim to the loathsome disease herself.

When Dr. Lombard stood beside her bed and gazed in mortal agony upon the pinched features and sunken eyes of the wife he loved so dearly, he could have cried aloud against the cruel decree that had gone forth to deprive him of his beloved helpmate, his little child of so wise a mother, and the white-haired, stricken old master of Tanglewood, of his one solace on earth.

"Oh, Becky! Becky! why did I listen to you when you begged to share my peril?"

The husband's heart-broken wail pierced the senses of the dying woman. She opened her languid lids and motioned him to kneel beside her. He obeyed, and knelt with his face close to hers, so he might catch every whispered word.

"Husband, I am not afraid to die. I did what I thought was my duty. Don't grieve for me. Live for our daughter; live for poor father; live for me. Come to me, my husband; follow me; make a Christian of our little one; cultivate her heart; foster all womanly virtues in her. And now kiss me once more; we've been very happy, husband,—so happy—so happy; and we will be again,—again, when we all four meet in heaven,—you and father, and my Bertha; my precious, precious Bertha! Teach her how to live, husband, so that she need not be afraid to die."

Her voice was low, but clear and silvery, and it had a far-away sound as if Rebecca Lombard had already reached the spirit-land where the angels were waiting to greet her, and had only paused upon the threshold long enough to utter her last, sweet good-by to the beloved mourners she was leaving behind her.

She died calmly and peacefully, with one hand clasped in her husband's fond grasp, and the other resting on the white locks of her father, whose bowed head was buried in the bedclothes.

A new vault was built in the family graveyard, in the garden at Tanglewood. Stern and white, Dr. Lombard stood near it giving the needful directions.

"Make it large enough for two."

The workmen looked up in horrified uncertainty as to what he might mean.

"Make it large enough for two," he repeated, calmly.

"I will claim a resting-place there before long."

Then he walked back into the house, and into the little parlor, where a cold, sheeted form lay awaiting interment. Dr. Lombard bent over it, and kissed the marble-white forehead, and the pale, unresponsive lips. Then he knelt and prayed for his child. Prayed long and fervently. Prayed that God would take care of the little one who was so soon to be fatherless as well as motherless. Prayed that kind Heaven would spare the feeble old man who would so soon be her only friend and stay until she had safely passed the years of helpless childhood. Committed her fervently, trusting, into the hands of the orphan's God. Then he arose from his knees and went in search of his father-in-law. He found the bereaved father sitting in his lonely bedroom with little Bertha sobbing in his arms while he tried to tell her of her dear mamma's dying words, but could not for the trembling of his voice, and for the tears that would come.

Dr. Lombard seated himself in a chair by the old man, and, lifting his little daughter on to his own lap, he took her childish face between both his hands, and turned the tearful eyes upward until he could gaze right into them. Then he spoke to the child solemnly and earnestly,—

"My little daughter, I want you to listen well to all I have to say to you, and I want you to try and remember it, every word of it; try and remember it

years hence when you may be entirely alone in the world,—when I may have gone to mamma in heaven, and grandpa may have left you too. I want you to try, my Bertha, and grow up to be as good a woman as your mother was. You will be poor, comparatively, but try and not let riches tempt you to do violence to your own heart. Be truthful and honest, little daughter, before all things. Avoid a lie or the appearance of one as you would the pestilence. Be true to your natural instincts; be true to your mother's early training, and my girl's future will be safe. God bless you and keep you, my precious one. Now, go; I must talk to your grandfather."

Wondering and frightened, the child slid from his arms and obeyed him.

"Why do you talk so, Lombard?" asked Major Snowe as the little figure disappeared through the door. "You are gloomy, and you double her gloom by such discourse."

"My own time is coming rapidly," replied Dr. Lombard, gravely. "I feel it in my veins. I shall follow Rebecca in less than two days. My grief is all for you and the poor little one. You will be so lonely—so helpless—if Mrs. Barrow——"

"Hold!" exclaimed the old man, raising his right hand wrathfully!—"hold! I never wish to hear that name mentioned; she fled from Rebecca's death-bed; she abandoned her husband in his last extremity,—don't speak of her in connection with our precious Bertha."

Dr. Lombard was silent for a moment. "We will leave the future in the hands of God, trusting that he will raise up friends to our poor little one."

The physician's gloomy presentiment proved but too fearfully correct. Rebecca Lombard had lain in her narrow home but two days when the husband she had loved so well went to share it with her; and an old, white-haired man, feeble with years, and bowed with grief, and a heart-broken child of eleven years

were left alone in the desolate house to bear their burden of sorrow as best they might.

And so the shadows fell upon the young life of Bertha Lombard, — blotting out the memory of all the past sunshine. Changing her from a happy, laughing, careless child into a quiet, gentle, low-voiced little thing, whose sweet brown eyes and tiny mouth had such a sadly plaintive look about them that one involuntarily longed to take her in one's arms and soothe her with gentle words and loving caresses. It was a pitiful sight to see her and the bowed old master of the house as they sat alone through the long summer days, each striving so ineffectually to cheer the other and to repress their own anguished murmurings.

The chess-table was laid aside now forever; and the dust lay thick upon the mimic warriors who had seen such active service under the old major's command. And the hours that were once devoted to the game were spent now in grave and somber converse between an old man and a sad-browed child.

Over and over again would Bertha beg her grandfather to tell her exactly what mamma had said when she was dying. She knew it all by heart at last, and wrote it in a little, round, childish hand on the inside lid of her own little Bible.

"Grandpa," she said, when asked why this was done, "you know my dear papa begged me to try and grow up to be just like mamma. I am afraid I might forget, after awhile, just how mamma used to talk. Whenever I feel I'm forgetting her I'll read this in my Bible, and then it will seem as if mamma was talking to me herself."

Then she wrote under them the last injunctions of her father.

"I'm going to grow up by these, grandpa. It will be like obeying dear papa and mamma all my life."

So the long, sad summer wore away. The cup of sorrow had been presented to Bertha's childish lips most unexpectedly. She had quaffed the bitter draught amid

tears and wild outcries against the cruelty of Heaven. She believed that she had drained it to the dregs, and yet there was a reserve of trouble in store for her that might well have appalled her childish soul had it not been mercifully hidden from her by the impenetrable obscurity of the future.

CHAPTER XX.

TREATS OF NOBODIES.

MRS. BARROW'S desire to compromise between her inclinations and the respect due her deceased husband—wait, let me reconstruct that sentence—Mrs. Barrow's desire to compromise between her inclinations and her fears of offending the proprieties, led her to select a quiet summer resort, where, to use her own words, "literally nobody ever went, where they actually did not know the meaning of the word 'dress,' and where positively nothing whatever was done from morning to night to keep one from dying of stagnation."

And now, readers mine, I am going to treat you to a bit of novelty.

You are all familiar, even unto satiety, with watering-places where somebody *does* go, where people *do* know the meaning of the word "dress," and where something is done by way of murdering the precious hours which fly all too swiftly at the best. You are familiar with them, either in your own experience or through the wordy description of some gushing creature in her first season, or the diametrically opposed description of some cynical old bachelor in his fortieth season; but Mrs. Otis Barrow's watering-place, where she went "solely for the benefit of her precious little

ones," was, of course, totally unlike any other watering-place that ever had been resorted to by mortals afflicted with real or imaginary ailments.

Nature had originally intended this spot for a delightful retreat—a sure-enough retreat from the noise and the glare and the bustle of the work-a-day world. She had signified such to be her royal intention by locating the wells of healing waters, which were the sole and primal cause of its ever becoming a resort, in as lovely and modest a little nook as ever played hide-and-seek amid sheltering hills and fragrant forests of pine and magnolia.

But the proprietors of this sylvan retreat had long since come to issue with nature, and had done all in their power to smooth away the barriers that made it so inaccessible to the fashionable world outside. Thanks to natural obstacles, however, it will never be brought within the list of decidedly fashionable watering-places, for one requires the assistance of a steamboat, railroad car, and finally a primitive old stage-coach is called into requisition before the journey is fairly achieved. "Accommodation line" they call the lumbering old stages in their advertisement,—so called because they refuse every request made of them, go just when it best suits themselves, and totally ignore the fact that the human freight they convey from the railroad to the Wells is compounded of flesh and blood and bones, and hence is liable to breakage and bruising.

Mournful contemplation that, after one has accomplished the feat of getting to the Wells, one should find nobody there!

Mrs. Barrow suffered the ignominy of finding herself the one somebody in a crowd composed of seventy or eighty nobodies.

If our Lady Agnes had been given to that most curious of all studies, the study of her fellow-man, she would have discovered that there is a good deal of human nature in the nobody as well as in the somebody. But the study of character or of the human

face divine entered as seldom into her calculations as the mastering of Hebrew or Sanscrit.

Some one has said, "Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are." Mrs. Barrow said, "Tell me what a woman wears, and I will tell you what she is."

Unfortunately the crowd in which she found herself at the Wells wore motley, and as she could not read motley, she pronounced the wearers thereof "No-bodies."

The fashions of more than a dozen revolving seasons were flaunted before her tortured eyes with the complacent serenity that can spring from blissful ignorance alone. There was one individual whose appareling approximated so nearly to the fashion of the day, and, withal, gave such unmistakable signs of a full purse, that Mrs. Barrow allowed herself to be approached by the wearer thereof; but she repented her momentary weakness immediately, when her teeth were put upon edge by being asked "what county in Louisiana she hailed from?"

"We have no counties in Louisiana; we have parishes," replied Mrs. Somebody, freezingly. And Mrs. Nobody retired into her normal insignificance, depressed in spirits but improved in geography, let us hope.

A sociably-inclined old lady, from Georgia, given to gossiping and snuff-dipping,* saw the stately widow sitting alone on the long gallery that skirted the building from end to end; and pitying her black robes and apparent sadness, she started toward her, snuff-box and brush in hand, on hospitable thoughts intent, but before she reached the spot Mrs. Barrow's long robes had disappeared within her own door, and the baffled aspirant for the honor of her acquaintance found herself in company of the vacated chair alone, and confronted by the inhospitably closed door.

* A Georgian and North Mississippi custom exclusively, and not a "Southern custom."

"Humph!" exclaimed the old lady, dipping her brush reflectively into her snuff-box. "Stiff-necked—all them swamp-planters is—anyhow."

After these two rebuffs, no one made any attempts to raise Mrs. Barrow from her self-elected isolation.

One advance in civilization had been made at the Wells, which proves how the spirit of humbuggery permeates the land throughout its length and its breadth. Croquet, that most delightfully stupid of all meaningless humbugs, had found its way to the Wells.

A dozen or more intoxicated-looking wickets were stuck around, in an irrelevant sort of fashion, over a ridgy lawn. Half a dozen irrelevant-looking mortals stood in irrelevant positions, armed with mallets, with which, every once in awhile, they would hit an unoffending ball an irrelevant blow, sending it in any direction whatsoever it chose to take; after which achievement the hero of the mallet would gaze around with looks of triumph, relevant of nothing to the uninitiated, until the grand final triumph of irrelevancy was accomplished by somebody's ball choosing to roll lazily up against a painted stick. It was pointless—the game, not the stick—but it was fashionable; hence worthy of the notice of Mrs. Barrow, who was graciously pleased to let Ralph and Helen join in the game, reasoning with herself that they would be there too short a time to be seriously contaminated by the other participants in the game.

She always took a book, however, and stationed herself under a tree that overlooked the lawn, from which point she could observe any undue familiarity that Helen might be subjected to, and was prepared to annihilate the offender upon the spot.

For three weeks she had endured this durance vile, consoling herself for the misery of the present season by bright dreams of the coming one; when one evening, as she was sitting in solitary grandeur on her bench under a tree, watching the game of croquet in

reality, but pretending to read her book, a shadow fell upon the volume in her lap and remained there. She closed her book quickly, prepared to crush, with one withering glance, the presumptuous mortal who dared to pause in such close proximity to her sacred person.

She raised her eyes full of a composition of lofty scorn and concentrated contempt, prepared on the spot; but the expression of her eyes changed very suddenly, and I really believe her face betrayed much more gladness than she was quite aware of when she found herself face to face with Dr. John Reynard.

"Dr. Reynard! my kind, kind friend! Surely my good angel sent you here."

Which, transcribed upon the mental tablets of modest Dr. Reynard, read:

"Dr. Reynard, my handsome, irresistible friend! I've been more than half in love with you ever since the first moment I ever saw you, and your coming has made me perfectly happy."

Which, in reality, meant: Thank Heaven! a human being has come at last; somebody that one can talk to without being disgraced for life; some one who belongs to the world and can tell one what is going on in it. Surely his footsteps were directed hither in pity to my loneliness and isolation. So, now there were *two* people at the Wells.

Lucky Wells!

So Mrs. Barrow was no longer lonely. She had the most devoted and attentive of cavaliers in the person of the handsome physician.

He had come there with the settled purpose of trying to win Agnes Barrow for his wife. When John Reynard was in earnest about anything, he generally went about it in a very earnest fashion. He was very much in earnest this time, and he brought all his fascinations to bear upon the beautiful widow. The time was propitious, and he knew it. There was literally no competitor in the field, and he knew when once she found her way back into the beau-monde she would

have such a number to select from that his chance of success would be sadly diminished. He must secure her before they parted at the Wells. It was too good a thing to be left to chance.

There was no man in the world who understood the female sex better than did this crafty John Reynard. He was all things unto all women. Tyrannical and harsh to the gentle and yielding; courteous and deferential to haughty Agnes Barrow. It was not long before Mrs. Barrow found herself mentally contrasting his gentlemanly polish with the honest brusquerie of poor dead Otis, to the disparagement of the latter.

If Mr. Barrow had only had half of Dr. Reynard's cultivation, how much more agreeable we might have gotten on! she soliloquized.

So, now you are prepared, reader, for the announcement that before Mrs. Barrow turned her back upon the Wells that season, hoping "she might never lay eyes on them again," John Reynard had asked her to be his wife, with many prettily-worded apologies for telling so soon the love that would not remain unspoken another hour.

And Mrs. Barrow had said "Yes," and had even promised him it should be before very many months more passed.

"Did she love him?" My dear little girl, what an absurd question! Go play with your dolls.

"Did he love her?" You nonsensical boy! Where were you born, and what century do you belong to? You don't deserve the glorious destiny of having been born in the nineteenth century; nor are you entitled to the inestimable privilege of reading a nineteenth century novel. Go read Don Quixote.

CHAPTER XXI.

UNDER THE YOKE.

IN due course of time Mrs. Barrow became Mrs. Dr. Reynard.

Surprise was the predominant feeling excited in their small world. For the world had thought that so wealthy and attractive a woman as Agnes Barrow might aspire to something more than a physician whose name and fortune were not yet very prominent. But there was more than surprise in two little childish hearts that we wot of. There was wrath, fierce but impotent; there was indignant sorrow that any one else should come to fill the vacant place of him who had been dearest of all to them. There was shed torrents of rebellious tears when they were bidden to call this usurper by the name that should have been sacred to memory forever. A poor little boy fist was clinched in childish rage as Ralph vowed he "would never, never call him father!—no, not if they killed him for it." And then Helen, who thought Ralph's ire very terrible indeed, and knew not but that any exhibition of it might bring down upon him some condign punishment, dried her own tears and began pleading, in company with old Dora, that he would try and treat their new father with respect.

Mrs. Barrow had been married in New Orleans, and had forwarded the intelligence of that event by letter to her children.

The bridal-party expected to follow the letter immediately, and old Dora, though her own faithful heart was full of grief and bitterness, was striving conscientiously to drill her two little charges into some sem-

blance of respect and acquiescence in the new order of things.

To bring Helen to terms had been comparatively easy work. She had used a few cabalistic words: "My little missy, yo' poor dear pa, what is a saint in heaven now, would want you to treat yo' new pa wid respec'."

And poor little Helen, without entering into any metaphysical speculation as to what her sainted father's views in regard to his successor might possibly be, accepted Aunt Dora's daring exposition of them, and promised "to be good for dear papa's sake."

But Ralph indignantly scouted the idea that his father would approve of any such treachery to his memory, as would necessarily be implied by allegiance to the usurper, and stoutly refused to make any terms.

"I'd kill him if I could," was the boy's final wrathful exclamation in answer to old Dora's oft-repeated objurgation "to be good."

"But, Ralphy, we have to call him something," said Helen, piteously. "What are you going to call him, brother?"

"I'm going to call him 'him and you and he and him,'" said the young rebel.

"And git your ears boxed for your pains," said old Dora, exasperated out of all show of patience.

"Let him try it," replied the boy, purple with rage.

Thus matters stood when Dr. Reynard and his bride arrived at Aland.

They were met by a hundred obsequious slaves, who acted, perforce, on the principle "*le roi est mort—vive le roi!*"

As the self-made man stepped from the luxurious carriage that Otis Barrow had provided for the penniless Agnes Snowe, and gazed round upon the throng of Otis Barrow's slaves who had come to greet him as their master with humble bows and lowly courtesies; as his quick eye glanced as far as it could reach over the noble domain into mastership of which he had en-

tered, his soul swelled within him, and he thought, with exultation, that the bread he had cast upon the waters when Otis Barrow had died had returned to him in the shape of a goodly loaf large and fair to look upon.

Step by step, John Reynard, he murmured inwardly, as he aided his wife to alight with all the suavity of a courtly gentleman. Step by step, my boy; round by round; and surely you have reached the topmost round at last.

Old Dora stood awaiting them in the front door, holding Helen's little trembling hand in her great brown one.

Mrs. Reynard stooped and pressed a frozen kiss on the child's quivering lips. "Helen, there is your new papa. You are to call him 'father,' and be good and obedient to him." This in a voice as stern and cold as if poor little Helen had already been caught in half a dozen treasonable attempts to subvert the Reynard authority, instead of standing there tremblingly and quiveringly, only asking for somebody to be "good" to her.

But Mrs. Reynard still clung to her old-time belief that "Helen was perfectly incorrigible," and treated her with the rigidity that orthodoxy recommends for such ne'er-do-weels.

Helen stepped forward timidly and raised a rosebud mouth to be kissed. Then John Reynard did the heartiest thing anybody had ever seen him do. He took the little trembling creature into his arms, and, looking kindly into her great, wondering gray eyes, he kissed her, and told her he felt sure he and she were going to be very good friends; at any rate, if they were not, the fault should not be his.

"Where is Ralph?" asked Mrs. Reynard of old Dora.

"I don't know, ma'am," began the old woman, nervously. "I begged him——"

"Never mind, my dear," said the physician, blandly,

addressing his wife; "no coercion, I desire. Let the boy come to me when he chooses; and we will wait, if you please, until he does choose."

So Dr. and Mrs. Reynard proceeded to the library, where a bright wood fire sparkled and crackled a cheery welcome to them, while Helen hastened away to find Ralphy, and tell him "how nice papa Reynard was."

She had to search for him a long time. She found him at last curled up in the bottom of the sail-boat in the boat-house. He was very cold and very miserable, and very sullen and very determined.

"Oh, Ralphy!" cried Helen, scrambling into the boat, and seating herself by him. "He isn't a bit awful. He took me and kissed me, and said he was going to be good to me."

"And you kissed him?" roared Ralph, in a voice of mingled scorn and rage.

"Ye-es," said poor little Helen, timidly acknowledging her guilt.

"You traitor!" cried her brother, looking down in utter scorn upon her feminine weakness from the altitude of his own wrathful rectitude.

"Oh, Ralphy, Ralphy, don't talk to me that way! You know I did love dear, dear papa. You know you didn't love him a bit better than I did; but papa's dead, and Aunt Dora says——"

"Don't tell me what Aunt Dora says. You never loved father, or you wouldn't be so ready to love this man, that's come and taken his place."

"Ralphy, we have to live with this new father all our lives. Would our own dear papa be any happier in heaven for knowing that we were perfectly miserable on earth? Oh, Ralphy dear! come, go to the house with me, and make friends with him."

"I won't."

"Ralphy," said Helen, gravely, "do you know I'm afraid that he must think you a very bad boy already?"

"What right has he to think anything about me?" said Ralph, excitedly, facing around upon his sister with flashing eyes.

"I don't know, brother; but when mamma asked where you were, and was going to send for you, he told her 'no,'—to let you alone—he would wait until you came of your accord—he didn't want any cursing. So, you see, brother——"

"Cursing!" interrupted Ralph, incredulously. "What right had he to say I cursed?"

Then he bounded from his seat and tore past Helen, leaving her in trembling uncertainty as to whether he meditated suicide or manslaughter. One or both seemed imminent.

As soon as her first terror was over, she ran after him, determined to stand by Ralphy to the death.

Half blinded with passion, the storm-tossed boy strode into the room where his hated stepfather was sitting cosily, chatting with his wife.

Without other greeting to either of them, Ralph confronted his stepfather with,—

"Whoever told you that I cursed?"

Dr. Reynard glanced in surprise at Mrs. Reynard, and Mrs. Reynard cast a glance of equal bewilderment on the excited boy who stood before them.

"I say—I want to know whoever told you that I cursed?"

Dr. Reynard's eye was filled with a baleful light as he fixed Ralph with a steady glance, but his voice betrayed no excitement as he inquired, in a slow, quiet voice,—

"Mrs. Reynard, my dear, has there ever been any insanity in your family?"

Mrs. Reynard, not presuming this to be a serious question, vouchsafed it no answer. Instead, she turned to her son,—

"Ralph, what do you mean? Explain yourself, sir, or I shall have you locked up until you do."

"He said he didn't want any of my cursin'. I know

he said it, for Helen says so, and I never heard Helen tell a lie in my life."

By this time Helen herself had appeared upon the scene of action, frightened and tearful.

"Helen," began Mrs. Reynard, magisterially, "did you tell your brother that Dr. Reynard said he did not want any of his cursing?"

"Yes, ma'am," said the child, promptly, looking her straight in the face.

"Do you know that you told him a terrible falsehood?" said the mother, in her most judicial voice.

"Oh, no, mamma," said Helen, quickly. "I never told a story in my life! Don't you remember," she went on eagerly, "when you wanted to send for brother, Doc—pa—father [the word came halting] said, 'No cursin',—let the boy come to me when he wants to'?"

The light of superior wisdom broke over Dr. Reynard's stormy face.

"Ah, I see, my dear, a mistake,—really a most ludicrous one, but a perfectly natural one. My little daughter heard me make use of the word 'coercion,' from which has arisen this most amusing misunderstanding."

Then, with a perfect sarcasm of suavity, he turned to Ralph, and gave him the orthography, meaning, derivation, and Heaven knows what not of the terrible word which had so excited the boy's wrath.

Ralph looked and felt most ludicrously cheap.

Helen was radiant at the re-establishment of her character for veracity.

Ralph turned and left the room sullenly. The mellifluous tones and studied politeness of his new father irritated him beyond measure. It, in a manner, cut the ground from under his feet.

His little soul had been full of heroic determination to be faithful to his father's memory. He had formed a thousand and one plans by which he would show this usurper that he looked upon him as such. He

rather enjoyed the idea that divers and fearful punishments would be inflicted upon him for the same, looking upon it as a sort of martyrdom of the faithful. But this extremely polite—this unctuous—mortal would give him nothing to hang a quarrel on. He merely laughed his childish ebullitions to scorn, and treated him with the lofty indulgence one accords a baby, a lunatic, or other irresponsible being.

For a month or two things were not as placid as was desirable at Aland.

Poor little Ralph raged and sulked alternately, but had at last sullenly to acknowledge that there was a will at Aland stronger than his own, and a determination to be master which his child-will, fierce as it was, could not circumvent.

Helen accepted the situation from the first, and before a week was out had “father” as glibly as if she had said it to Dr. John Reynard all her little life.

But the most decided fruit born of those first two months of Mrs. Reynard’s existence was the knowledge, on that lady’s part, that Agnes Snowe had found her master.

Yes, she had come under the yoke,—unintentionally, unexpectedly, undesiringly,—nevertheless, under it she was. True, her courteous spouse had padded and cushioned the marital yoke with soft words and silken blandishments, so that it should not gall the stately neck so unused to its pressure; but she felt it all the same whenever she tried on any of the little imperious ways with which she used to bring poor Otis Barrow to terms.

She was “my dear,” and “Agnes, my love,” and “my charming wife,” and a thousand other pretty things to Dr. John Reynard; and never had woman more deference shown her in public, or more delicate little attentions showered upon her in public and in private; but, in spite of it all,—in spite of pretty names and tender deference,—Mrs. Reynard always did as Dr. Reynard desired. Dr. Reynard seldom, if

ever, did as Mrs. Reynard desired, and no one recognized the fixedness of this fact sooner than did the haughty, selfish, imperious, unreasonable Agnes Barrow, who had made the grave a refuge of peace and haven of rest to the honest, generous, kind-hearted man who had rescued her from a life of abject poverty.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LAST DROP IN BERTHA LOMBARD'S CUP.

FIVE times had the snow-drops and the violets that orphaned Bertha had planted around the single grave that held her all blossomed and faded, shedding their beauty and their fragrance like a benediction upon the heads of the tranquil dead beneath them. Five times the starry jasmine, that the same loving little hands had taught to clamber over the cold marble in rich festoons, had scattered its milky petals in a soft snow-storm over the vault that covered her father and her mother, when the last drop of sorrow was poured into Bertha's already brimming cup, and her childish lips were forced to drink to the bitter dregs.

The girl's early sorrows, and her subsequent life of seclusion and loneliness, had told upon her sadly, making her far graver and quieter than was befitting her tender years. There was a tinge of melancholy in her manners, and a softened, subdued look about her sweet mouth and dovelike eyes, that was most pitiful to behold in so young a creature. She had never had a companion of her own age.

True, the old affection between herself and her more fortunate cousins had continued unabated, but then it had been liable to so many interruptions.

The constant summer migrations of the Aland people made long seasons of dreary loneliness for poor little Bertha, during which her child's soul longed for some more congenial life, some more stirring existence than her sleepy one, with an infinite yearning.

Her days were spent in loving and untiring attendance upon her feeble old grandfather, who had been slowly but steadily failing ever since the day on which it had pleased inscrutable Providence to deprive him, and his still more helpless little granddaughter, of son and daughter, father and mother, at one cruel blow.

He would sit for hours in one sunny spot on the veranda if it were summer, or in the same corner of the fireplace, by the sitting-room fire, if it were winter, and with Bertha on a low seat at his feet, where he could rest his trembling, withered old hand upon her bright sunny brown hair, would maunder on, half childishly, half sadly, about the old times when Becky and Julia and Agnes were all at home, and were hardly bigger or older than Bertha's self.

And Bertha never tired of asking questions about those old times. She loved to hear stories of her mother's girlhood. She loved to ask questions about the aunt who was a great lady living in France, whom she had never seen, but who sometimes wrote to her Aunt Reynard, and would occasionally ask "how poor Becky's child came on." Becky's little daughter used to try to imagine them all back in the old house. She tried to people Tanglewood with its old-time occupants; but the sweeping velvets and silk trains of her Aunt Reynard as she knew her, seemed laughably out of place on the old faded carpet of their sitting-room, and for the life of her she could not imagine Aunt Verzenay sleeping comfortably in the little slim-posted bedstead up-stairs in the room grandpa said used to be hers.

So Bertha gave up her fancy pictures and came back to the present, when her grandfather would say, in his

slow, monotonous voice, "But they are all gone now,—all gone,—every one of them."

"Oh! no, grandpa," Bertha would remonstrate, "not gone. Dear mamma is the only one gone. Aunt Verzenay and Aunt Reynard are not gone."

"They are gone, child,—gone. Deader than Becky,—far deader, far deader; for Becky's body alone is dead. But they—they are dead in heart, dead in soul, dead in all goodness, dead to all humanity."

Then Bertha, failing to understand him, wisely forbore attempting to answer him.

There was one bright element, however, in Bertha's somber existence, and that one element was Ralph. During the first year of Dr. Reynard's reign at Aland, Ralph had spent about two-thirds of his time at Tanglewood. His stepfather was hateful to him, his home distasteful, so almost every day would see his tiny skiff skimming swiftly over the rippling waters of the lake, and himself coming to Bertha with a fresh budget of grievances, which he expected her to listen to sympathetically, and help him pronounce sentence of excommunication on the author of them all. The sympathy was readily accorded, and so fully, so sweetly, so generously, that Ralph would throw his arms around his fragile girl cousin and declare boisterously that he loved her better than he did anything in the wide world. But when he wanted her to join in his wholesale abuse of his stepfather, and eagerly demanded her indorsement of his dictum that there never was a more detestable tyrant raised into authority over suffering boy-martyr, he found that Bertha was inclined to be conservative, and instead of passing wholesale judgment on Dr. Reynard, would essay to soothe Ralph's wounds with wholesome advice, gently enough spoken 'tis true, and wise old saws about the duty of children, which came with quaint gravity from her sweet little child-mouth.

But Ralph would stop her with, "Oh, I say now, Berth, you're not going to preach too, are you? Leave

that to Aunt Dora. She's taken orders some time ago, writes D.D. after her name, and all that sort of thing."

"D.D. stands for Darky Dora as well as Doctor of Divinity," Bertha would reply, right merrily, "so Aunt Dora is entitled to it, sir."

"Now then, you are talking like the dear little girl that you are, and not like a parson," replied Ralph, the clouds disappearing from his face as the threatened sermon ended in a quibble.

All the few pleasures of Bertha's life came with her cousin's coming. Sometimes Helen was with him; oftener he came alone. Dr. Reynard had taken a strange fancy to make Helen love him better than she did anything on earth, and she was in a fair way to do so. To which end he kept her constantly with him, teaching her how to ride, taking her fishing with him, taking her long walks, during which he gave himself up unreservedly to amusing her, stocking a flower-garden for her, bringing her pets and training them for her, until he had won for himself the very first place in the fresh young heart. Ralph resented this bitterly, and it was one of the grievances he most often and most loudly poured into Bertha's sympathizing ears.

"He's taken her away from me, Berth. I loved her so dearly, and she used to love me better than she did anybody in the world. But now she sides with him against me. She's gone over to him, and turned against me. They're all against me over home, cousin. Mother and Dr. Reynard, and Helen, and Aunt Dora, and even—why, Bertha! my very dog, my pretty Blanche, that was the last thing father ever gave me, follows him in preference to me! Think of that!" And Ralph paused, as if this last instance of desertion must excite even the placid Bertha.

"Maybe he feeds him better than you do," answered Bertha, prosaically.

"Him! what makes you call Blanche 'him'?" said Ralph, with boyish petulance. "But he don't. I feed

her until she can't eat another mouthful. No, he's a witch."

"Wizard, Ralphy," suggested Bertha, who knew more about books than she did about dogs.

"Well, witch or wizard," said the inconsistent boy, impatiently,— "sex don't make any difference."

"Oh, I thought it did," replied Bertha, demurely; "you got so impatient over my calling Blanche 'him.' But, cousin," she would resume, more gravely, "you ought not to talk as if Helen had ceased to love you because she has learned to love her stepfather. I am sure he takes enough pains, and does everything he can to make her love him,—what a strange girl she would be if she did not!"

"Well, yes, I suppose she would; but I can't love him. I know that. I suppose it's because she's a girl," concluded this man in embryo, who could only account for his sister's shortcomings on the score that she was a woman in embryo.

Bertha generally brought these unwholesome discussions to an abrupt termination by proposing a ramble after wild grapes, muscadines, or pecans; or else her hen's-nest wanted fixing, or she required Ralph's superior powers as amateur detective to discover the retreat of some secretive guinea, or else her flowers were getting terribly weedy, or something had to be done, which led the busy little woman and the discontented boy away from the discussion of things they could not alter to the remedying of small troubles, that gave them at once healthful occupation and serene enjoyment.

But, after Dr. Reynard had been master at Aland for one little year, he gave Mrs. Reynard a piece of advice, which, like all the advice he was kind enough to give that lady, was acted upon promptly.

Dr. Reynard loftily pronounced the whole educational system of the United States a grand piece of humbuggery: "Would do well enough for those who were too poor to avail themselves of better; but as

Mr. Barrow had left a princely fortune to his children, it was but right that they should be educated as became the possessors of such vast estates."

Mrs. Reynard approved, as Mrs. Reynard approved of everything Dr. Reynard said or did.

So to Europe they were taken: Helen to be left in charge of her aunt, Madame Verzenay; Ralph to be placed at a highly recommended institution of learning near Paris.

Thus had the one bright element been taken out of Bertha Lombard's life. Ralph, the bright boy who declared that he loved her better than he did anything in the world, was gone. Ralph, whom she loved with a love intensified by her own loneliness, and the scarcity of objects upon which to lavish the wealth of her loving soul, was gone for an indefinite number of years. True, they corresponded furiously; and writing to Ralph, and reading his affectionate letters in return, was the one pleasure of Bertha's life.

Gradually, however, Bertha got used to living on without ever seeing her handsome young cousin, and had settled back into the old monotony of her life,—a life which consisted of one unchanging round of duties,—light ones, it is true, but so grave, and so unvarying, that Bertha bade fair to be an old woman before her time.

It was a bright October,—the October of the year 18—. The atmosphere was clearer than is often seen in this damp climate of ours, and the intense blue of the sky was faithfully mirrored in the glassy bosom of the little lake. The golden-rod waved its yellow plumes in autumnal beauty, while the flaming trumpet-flower flaunted in insolent triumph above myriads of little modest, purple stars that sought to fling their mite of beauty before the reluctant feet of departing summer. The crows were cawing loudly in the tops of the tall pecans, as they rejoiced over their nutty harvest. The trees were preparing to put on their autumn robes of many colors. The cotton crops were

hanging in fleecy maturity waiting to be gathered,—everything betokened that the year's work was almost done, and man was about to reap the harvest of his good or ill deeds for that season.

In this season of ripened fruits, the reaper Death saw fit to gather into his harvest the full and ripened sheaf of the old master of Tanglewood. He had been failing so gradually that the inexperienced eyes of his granddaughter noted no change in him when he sent for her one morning of this bright October and told her he was too ill to rise. In extreme alarm Bertha asked him what she must do.

"Send over for Dr. Reynard and his wife; I must see them."

The Reynards had but a few days before returned from their summer trip, and although Mrs. Reynard, at stated and distant periods, went regularly through the formula of paying a meaningless visit to her old father and desolate little niece, there had been no intimacy whatever existing between the two households.

A message to the effect that "old master was dying," of course brought Dr. Reynard and Mrs. Reynard promptly to the spot. What little heart those two worldlings possessed between them, must certainly have been touched when they entered the bedroom where the sick man lay. His heavy and labored breathing could be heard before the door was opened. A group of half-frightened and half-curious negroes was clustered around the entrance to the room. Within were two negro women nurses, a heart-broken child, with her head buried in the bedclothes, and a white-haired old man, slowly and painfully breathing his life away. Mrs. Reynard's silken train rustled disagreeably as she glided over the bare floor to her father's bedside. The crinckling silk attracted his attention; he opened his almost sightless eyes and fixed them upon the handsome face of his daughter as she bent over him.

"Father, can I do anything for you?"

It was an effort for him to answer. The words came far apart and in a labored voice.

"For me, nothing. Becky's child; she has no home; she is no beggar; see." And he laid his hand upon a package of papers lying on the bed beside him. "This will pay—you—for taking care—of her."

"Oh, father!" there was a world of reproach in Mrs. Reynard's voice.

The old man seemed to gather himself together for one final struggle.

"I ask no favor at your hands, Agnes Snowe,—unnatural daughter! false wife! cruel woman!"

For a second time in her life Agnes Reynard shivered under death-bed reproaches.

"Father, forgive me!" And for a second time she knelt at the eleventh hour to ask pardon for the neglect of a lifetime. But either outraged parental affection was more implacable than the husband's wounded feelings, or else the feeble old man had exhausted the powers of speech in those last reproachful utterances; for he would not speak again.

"Unnatural daughter! false wife! cruel woman!" were the last words he ever spoke, and they came back to Agnes Reynard with a fearful distinctness night after night when she strove in vain to forget them and to lose sight of that lonely old man, dying without one creature of his own blood near him save a little frightened child, who was sobbing her childish soul away in terrified helplessness.

* * * * *

So Bertha went to live at Aland when she was a sad-browed child of fourteen years only. What cannot one get used to in this world? what burden is too great for poor humanity to bear? what sorrow too terrible to be outlived?

In our happy ignorance we look forward and cry in affright that "we cannot, cannot stand it, we will die under it, our hearts will break." But that very ca-

lamiety comes upon us, and lo ! we can and do stand it, we do not die under it, and our hearts break not.

Our fortunes take wings unto themselves and fly. We make our moan ; we declare we can never, never recover from the blow ; but then we go on, and we eat and we drink and we make merry and fall to dreaming of other possible fortunes.

Our friend, the friend whom we believed in with a faith divine, plays us false. Our heart-pulse quivers with the shock ; we call aloud on Heaven to take us from a world where all is hollow, hollow, hollow ; but a week, a month, a year passes, and we still find this hollow world a habitable place, and we fasten the torn tendrils of our faith upon a new support, and go on believing and trusting, as in the days of yore.

The mother that bore us is called hence. The grave closes over our most precious earthly possession. In the wildness of our grief we declare that we too would die ; that life has no charm for us. But Time comes with healing on his wings, and our wild grief changes to a gentle sorrow, then softly merges into tender regret, and still we live. For nothing kills. The human heart is elastic, or faithless, or strong to bear, or weak to retain, which you will.

Our love deceives us : we eat, drink, and sleep. Death robs us of treasure after treasure : we eat, drink and sleep. The foul breath of slander kills our fair fame : we eat, drink, and sleep. Bereft of every joy, alone, poverty-stricken, sorrow-laden : we eat, drink, and sleep. Oh, precious anatomy ! whose welfare soars so high above all considerations of sorrow or of joy, of pain or of passion, we bow to thy sublimity and to the three only great human needs—Eating, Drinking, Sleeping!

Poor little Bertha didn't think quite all that, but she had a vague sort of a notion that if any one had told her six years before that her father and her mother would both die in one week, and that a few years after that her grandfather would follow them, and that

the old house at Tanglewood would be shut up and she be living at Aland, with no one for company but her cold Aunt Agnes and a perfectly strange gentleman, with the great ocean dividing her and her two cousins, she would have cried aloud in childish agony, that she could not, could not live through it,—that it would kill her, she knew it would. Yet, while these thoughts were surging through her brain, she was sitting quietly at the dinner-table between Dr. Reynard and his wife, not eating with a very hearty appetite it is true, nevertheless eating and drinking as if all that she loved on earth were not lying under the sod just across that little strip of water.

Bertha asked herself if she were not the most heartless of all human beings, else why had she not died.

Poor child, the burden of thinking had come upon her when she should only have been enjoying. She had begun to puzzle over her life's problem when she should have been dressing her dolls.

Alas ! poor little shorn lamb, pray that God temper the wind to thy sore need.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SUCH A NICE YOUNG MAN !

NATURE, in a merry mood one day, made a little man-mould ; quite a little one. It was not more than five feet five inches in length. The lower extremities were modeled after those "twin invaders of domestic peace" of which Mr. Simon Tappertit was so inordinately vain. They were perfect marvels of elegance in miniature. Surmounting these was a dapper little body that was admirably well fitted for a tailor's

dummy, which, in its turn, was surmounted by a short, thick neck, supporting a head as round as an apple and equally as devoid of all individuality. Into this mould Nature poured a composite mass of brass and suavity, and cunning and candor, and laziness and energy, and turned out—Mr. James Reynard.

Mr. James Reynard, or Jim Reynard, as his familiars preferred designating him, had improved on Nature to the extent of a very fierce-looking brown moustache,—the only awe-inspiring thing about him. He had an inveterate habit of twisting this hirsute adornment through his pudgy little fingers, striving thereby to give it a certain peculiar curve, which, in his own estimation, was all that was wanting to make the likeness between Mr. James Reynard and Victor Emmanuel strikingly apparent to the most careless observer.

Mr. James Reynard, you will remember, was the youth whom Dr. John Reynard was kind enough to recollect after he had made himself. He had sent for this young brother and given him a start in the world, as you will also remember. But the talent for making one's self did not seem to run in the family to any great extent. For although young James had availed himself of the generous start his brother had given him to the extent of keeping on in the world at an even jog-trot, he gave no promise of adding any lustre to the name of Reynard, nor of presenting for the world's admiration another specimen of that most insufferable of all bores, "a self-made man, sir."

I am afraid all the brilliant examples and sound precepts of a hundred brother Johns could never have made anything more of young James than what his most ardent young lady admirers pronounced him,—
"Such a nice young man!"

Yes, he *was* a nice young man, with nice little ways. And he wore nice shiny boots, and nice natty hats, and carried nice little canes, and said such pretty, nice things to nice, pretty girls. And altogether

was so nice, that that arch-schemer, brother John, began to think that so much niceness might be made available for certain purposes of his own, and hence did young James the additional honor of placing him among the tools with which he proposed to carve out a future for himself, corresponding in magnificence and security with the dazzling brilliancy of the present, upon which he had entered as master and temporary owner of Aland and all other properties belonging to the defunct Mr. Barrow.

As things stood at present, Dr. Reynard occupied, in the eyes of the world, the position of an upright and honorable administrator upon the property of two little helpless orphans. And the wise world pronounced Mrs. Barrow a wise woman for having selected so shrewd a business man and so correct a gentleman to take charge of her children's interests. For the present, therefore, all was well. Exceedingly well.

But time would not stand still even for the Reynards of this world, and there were two events in the future as inevitable as that future itself. Ralph would inevitably come of age (if he lived long enough), and Helen would as inevitably marry, if she lived long enough. When Ralph came of age he would enter into mastership of his own fortune. When Helen married, Helen's husband would enter into mastership of her fortune. Where then would Dr. Reynard and *his* fortune be? What more glorious position would he occupy than that of a discharged steward? Was that to be the end of all his plotting and planning and scheming? Was that to be the end of his glorious succession of successes since the time when he turned his back on the crumbling ancestral roof-tree and the old folks at home? Was that to be the end of his sacrifice (?) in giving up the passionate, adoring love of one whom he strove to forget for the haughty civility of his lady wife? No, by all the gods and goddesses that smile upon self-made men, never!

So John Reynard cast the Bible mandate, to "take

no thought of the morrow," to the winds, and began to take very serious and very constant thought of his morrow as soon as he had seen his stepson and daughter fairly established at their studies in Europe.

One of the two inevitable events in the future was plainly beyond his jurisdiction, and hence brain-labor expended upon it would be sheer waste of capital, and Dr. Reynard never wasted anything. Ralph would certainly come of age, and would as certainly take possession of his half of the immense fortune belonging to himself and sister. Even the genius of a John Reynard could not prevent that, so it must come about according to the will of Providence.

But about Helen's marriage. That opened a field for a glorious *coup d'état*, and John Reynard craftily concluded to strike it.

There must be no vulgar, bungling manœuvring. None of that coarse match-making business, that was so apparent as to be discernible to the very domestics about the house. James must be brought upon the scene of action while Helen was in Europe. He must become almost like an accepted member of the family before her return, so that his intimacy at Aland, when the young heiress should be at home, should excite no comment whatever. He must be trained to ingratiate himself with his sister-in-law, and make himself absolutely indispensable to her at a time when there was no apparent object for his flattering attendance upon her. Then the dénouement must bring itself about in a way that was to be totally unexpected to everybody, and to no one more than to Dr. Reynard himself. Helen married to James would be as good as unmarried, so far as the control of her property was concerned.

Such was the neat groundwork of the plan which Dr. Reynard mapped out by way of securing for himself a permanent share of the good things which had come to him with the dead man's shoes.

James's introduction into the family was effected

easily enough. He came up from New Orleans, where he still resided, to bring his brother some papers too important to be intrusted to a badly-conducted post.

Mrs. Reynard was charmed with the nice young man, who, in his turn, was "perfectly enraptured" with his beautiful, stately sister-in-law, and was so unsophisticated and so genuine that he could not hide his admiration at all.

Mrs. Reynard was rapidly becoming passé; hence a compliment to her personal charms weighed much more heavily than in the halcyon days when she knew that she was beautiful, and it was no novelty to be told so.

This ingenuous young flatterer did her good. He made her feel young again. To do that is a real kindness to any woman. He who does it is her benefactor. James Reynard slighted the budding beauties of Bertha Lombard to lavish extravagant praises upon the fading charms of her Aunt Agnes. James was a young man of unusual discrimination. She should like to have him always near her; besides, he made himself so useful. Mrs. Reynard had recently developed a passion for flowers. James certainly must either have been a natural-born botanical genius or else a gardener in disguise. It was wonderful the amount of knowledge he suddenly developed on the subject of flowers. Dr. Reynard's business was becoming so pressing that he rarely found time to drive his wife out in the pony carriage. James proved himself a perfect Jehu of a whip, at least he would have done so, I guess, if the lambs which Mrs. Reynard drove for ponies had only given him some opportunity to display his skill. So essential had he become to Mrs. Reynard, after a visit of two weeks' length, that she would not hear of his proposed departure.

The proposal for him to stay came from Mrs. Reynard herself. It was at night, after she and her husband had retired to their own apartment.

"James tells me he leaves us in the morning," said

Mrs. Reynard, pulling the hairpins out of her hair, as she sat before the fire.

"Yes, I believe so," replied Dr. Reynard, half suppressing a yawn of sleepiness or indifference.

"I really hate to see him go."

"And why, my dear?" asked her husband, inserting the heel of his boot in the bootjack.

"Because, he is an element of life in this dead old house. What with your eternal business, or eternal pretense of business, and Bertha's black dresses and blacker looks, one might as well be an Egyptian mummy for all the life one sees."

"Well, Agnes, my love," said Dr. Reynard, seeing his opportunity and seizing it, "as far as 'my eternal business,' or 'eternal pretense of business,' as you call it, goes, let me explain to you how utterly unavoidable it is that I should attend as closely as I do to the affairs of the estate. I wish, my dear wife, so to administer the affairs of your children that when the time comes that Ralph, as a man, shall desire an account of my stewardship, I shall be able to render it promptly and without a blush; and when that still more distant time comes when Helen's husband shall desire to know how her property has been administered upon, I desire to be able to satisfy him on all points. Do you remember, my love, that I was present when the deceased Mr. Barrow, your estimable husband, died, and heard his dying request that you should give his children an honest man for a stepfather? It ill becomes me to boast of my own integrity, but I humbly hope that when I deliver up the charge of the princely fortune your children have inherited, that my honesty will make itself apparent to all whom it may concern.

"To this end, my precious Agnes, I have to exercise a very close personal supervision of the different plantations; and hence, however painful to me, I have to deprive myself of a great deal of your society. At present I keep all the accounts myself. If I could

only find some one in whose honesty I could implicitly rely, I should be tempted to employ an assistant." Dr. Reynard heaved a sigh of infinite weariness as he concluded this pathetic oration.

Mrs. Reynard's eyes flashed with the light of inspiration.

"Oh, Dr. Reynard! I have such an idea! You say you want an assistant; and I want James to stay here. Certainly he is a person on whose honesty you can implicitly rely."

"My dear Agnes," said her husband, with effusion, "who but yourself could have devised so pleasant a way of settling at once my difficulty and accomplishing your own generous ends? But,"—and he seemed plunged in doubt once more,—“how do I know that James is a good accountant?”

"You can teach him," said Agnes, promptly, for she was bent upon keeping her youthful flatterer and useful appendage near her.

"Well," said the physician, indifferently, "we will sleep upon it,—then decide. Step by step, my dear,—never do anything in a hurry."

So, it was Mrs. Reynard, and not Dr. Reynard, who installed James Reynard at Aland.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN ADVERTISEMENT.

BERTHA LOMBARD had been a member of the Aland household about six months, and Mr. James Reynard had been airing his fascinations in the same quarter nearly two months of that time, when Dr. Reynard, having gotten all his private affairs into satisfactory trim, found time to play the benevolent uncle.

It having occurred to him that it was just possible that Bertha's sweet face and gazelle eyes might prove alike dangerous to young James's heart and his plans, he deemed it best to throw some impediment in the way of their constant companionship.

With all his intuitive wisdom, the wizard of Aland could not divine that in the bottom of Bertha's faithful little heart there was a stock of ardent affection for the absent Ralph that was a better safeguard for his precious matrimonial schemes than any his crafty brain could devise.

So he became suddenly and violently interested in Bertha's education, which had, indeed, been woefully neglected since the death of her parents. But matters must be mended, decided the autocrat of Aland. The papers which Major Snowe had handed him on his deathbed were satisfactory guarantees that Bertha had the wherewithal to defray her own expenses. So he magnanimously concluded she should be educated. As usual, the matter was submitted to Mrs. Reynard.

"My dear," he began, in his mellifluous tones, "do you know that we are neglecting our little niece's education in an unpardonable manner?"

"Yes," drawled Mrs. Reynard, in a voice of absolute indifference; for as Bertha had no expectations,

was nobody's heiress, and was altogether rather an unimportant personage, she had wasted but few thoughts upon the subject of her education.

"Yes," echoed her spouse, "and I think it is high time she was sent off to school."

"Sent off!" exclaimed Agnes, in tones of considerable animation. "She is entirely too useful to think of such a thing. I cannot spare her. Old Dora is failing every day, and Bertha fills her place splendidly. I suppose she inherits poor Becky's domestic tastes. I really do not think I can spare her."

"But, my dear," said the newly-developed philanthropist, "are you not acting somewhat selfishly in weighing Bertha's usefulness against her own good?"

"Mercy on us!" cried Agnes, petulantly. "Can't she be educated at home? Of course no one expects her to be accomplished as Helen needs to be; but she can learn all that she needs to learn from a governess, who can be hired for much less than Bertha could be sent off upon; and then, you know, she can still carry the keys and attend to the pickles and things."

Dr. Reynard maintained a thoughtful silence. It was a rule with him never to press his marital authority on minor points, whereby he preserved it fresh and vigorous for major points.

He pondered whether in the present instance the danger to James was imminent enough to make the ostracism of poor little Bertha peremptorily necessary. He concluded that it was not. His fertile brain hatched a new plan. He would tell James of the glorious destiny in store for him. And then, if he were worthy of his name, it would not lie in him to throw himself away upon penniless Bertha when for the waiting he could have wealthy Helen.

"Well!" impatiently uttered by Mrs. Reynard, broke up his protracted reverie.

"Well, my dear," was the amiable rejoinder, "as you seem so averse to parting with the dear child, you

shall have your own way. You certainly have the best right to dictate in this matter."

"Thank you," said Agnes, as gratefully as if he had yielded a point instead of acting with policy. So it was decided that Mr. Blanque, Mrs. Reynard's commission merchant, was to be authorized to procure a governess for Becky's daughter.

After the interchange of one or two letters, and the lapse of one or two weeks, there arrived at Aland, late one evening, a dark-eyed, sad-browed woman of twenty years maybe; a woman whose face told you that the lines of life had not fallen to her in pleasant places, whose lips told you nothing. It was a face with a history, and a sad one, if the gloom in her eyes spoke truth. Bertha saw in her something to love; for she had a heart and a soul, which her Aunt Agnes had not. Mrs. Reynard saw in her nothing but the governess who was to be sheltered and paid, and—nothing more. John Reynard saw, in one startled flash of recognition that darted from her dark, gloomy eyes, that fate had befriended him again by selecting for Bertha's governess a woman whose life secret chance had placed in his possession.

Aha! thought this protégé of the arch-fiend's, my ex-patient, my pretty little Frenchwoman, with more heart than discretion! I need a tool, and it has been sent to me. One more point gained. Step by step, John Reynard,—this while Dr. Reynard was courteously pressing upon the new teacher a leg of fried chicken.

CHAPTER XXV.

DR. REYNARD SHARPENS ONE OF HIS TOOLS.

OTIS BARROW's children had been drinking at European founts of knowledge for three years. In two more Ralph would be of age. He had already given indication of a budding spirit of independence by writing home to his mother that it was his intention to continue his studies but one year longer, after which he proposed traveling a year before returning to America.

This letter had set Dr. Reynard to thinking. A young man who had "intentions" and "proposed" doing things promised trouble in the future. Ralph had signified his intentions and proposals in the plainest English, in black and white, without even the courtesy of mentioning his (Dr. Reynard's) name in connection with those intentions. Ralph was a dangerous character. Ralph must be seen to.

Dr. Reynard cogitated seriously for two or three days over the boy's declaration of independence as set forth in his letter to his mother. The result of which cogitations, or at least the apparent result, was—a talk with his wife,—only this and nothing more.

"My love" (the older and more faded Agnes Reynard became the more prodigal her diplomatic spouse became of affectionate appellations), began the self-made man, "Ralph says he intends traveling a year before returning to America. I approve highly of his intention, for there is nothing that so expands a young man's mind or tends more to give him generous views of life and free him from the narrow bigotry of class than traveling. Moreover, a youth with your son's

brilliant prospects has every right to enjoy all that is enjoyable. But, my dear Agnes, do you not think it would be rather hazardous for a boy of Ralph's impulsive nature, all unsophisticated as he is, to be turned loose in a foreign country with an unlimited supply of money? He will inevitably fall a prey to sharpers of every description."

"What do you advise, then,—that I write to Ralph and tell him we object to his plan of traveling?"

"My dear Agnes, by no manner of means. So far from objecting, I cordially indorse his plan, and would not have the dear boy disappointed for worlds."

"Well, then, what do you wish?"

"What do I wish? My dear wife, I have no wishes on the subject. It is for Ralph's mother to decide alone. I would only advise, and it is natural to presume that as a man of the world I should have a clearer perception than yourself of the dangers your son will be exposed to, rich and inexperienced as he is. And my advice is that you send some steady young man, young enough and agreeable enough to make a pleasant traveling companion, and yet wise enough to restrain the boy's ardent generosity, to accompany him on his travels."

"But where can such a *rara avis* be found?" asked Mrs. Reynard.

"At present I am unprepared to say," answered her husband, deceitfully; "but we have plenty of time to look about us and make a careful selection." This, when he had already resolved that James and none other should play mentor to the young heir of Aland.

Mrs. Reynard had substituted her night-cap for her chignon, and was reflectively tying the strings thereof under her chin, when a bright idea seemed to strike her.

"Dr. Reynard!"

"Well, my love."

"Why should not James accompany Ralph?"

Dr. Reynard suspended the operation of pulling off his boot, and left the foot in the boot-jack, while his

countenance took on a thoughtful cast. "Well, my dear, I don't know."

"I do," replied Mrs. Reynard, briskly; "he will answer every purpose better than any one we can possibly get, I am sure."

"You always have your own way, *ma chère*; as I said before, the decision must rest entirely with yourself."

"Then, I say James shall go, and, of course," she continued, regally, "I defray his expenses."

"Of course you do nothing of the kind. James has been receiving a salary as my agent, which will be ample for his modest desires."

So Mrs. Reynard sent her son a traveling companion. And Dr. Reynard had a brotherly talk with the young man on the eve of his departure.

A private room in a restaurant was the chosen spot for this fraternal discourse, young James's rôle being to sit very quietly, listen very attentively, and imbibe his brother's views and desires very conscientiously.

"Remember, my lad," said John the Great to James the Little, "that in this European trip I am giving you another great lift, and I may as well say here, candidly, that it will, in all probability, be the last one. After what I have done for you, and am about to do for you, you will prove yourself a very poor stick, indeed, sir, if you cannot step into a fortune."

Young James murmured some half-audible expressions of undying gratitude towards his brother and benefactor.

"This visit to foreign countries ought to enable you to shine in the very best society. You are good-looking enough."

James the Little stroked his fierce moustache complacently.

"You are not wanting in brain, and if you cannot manage to cut out the country boors that will be dancing around Helen Barrow as soon as she appears in society, you don't deserve half the good fortune you've already met with, sir."

If brass and self-complacency are characteristics calculated to win their way with the coming heiress of Aland, the "rustic boors" will stand but a poor chance, indeed.

"And now for the real object of your journey." Mrs. Reynard wishes you to accompany her son on his travels. He proposes spending one year and God knows how many thousand dollars in wandering around aimlessly before he comes home to take possession of his property. I think it the best plan for me to talk to you very plainly. There is no love lost between Ralph Barrow and myself. He hates me because, I suppose, I stepped into his father's shoes; he hates me as he would have hated any other man under the same circumstances. I have no reason to love him, because I have always found him an unruly, turbulent boy,—insolent in the extreme when a mere child, and, of course, coming home doubly charged with insolence. So, you can fancy that Ralph Barrow's future happiness is not the nearest thing to my heart. His mother sends you over, loaded with minute and foolish injunctions to keep Ralph away from temptations; to curb him in the expenditure of money, and to influence him against drinking. I say you are not to interfere with the boy in any respect, unless you want him to turn his back on you for your impudence. You are not even to let him know that you have been sent by any one. The knowledge that you are my brother will incline him against you in the first place; then, if you were to undertake to play mentor, you would find yourself politely requested to mind your own business. Remember, you are simply to accompany him as any other young man who proposed a year's travel might do. You have no right to keep him out of temptation, for he is his own master,—only see that you share in his amusements in moderation yourself, as your future has still to be made. You will not undertake to curb him in his expenditure of money, for the money is his own, and any interference on your part or mine,

would be the height of impertinence. As for his drinking, he is certainly the best judge of what he shall drink, and how much he can stand. But in this connection, let me say to yourself, whatever you drink, avoid that most fearful of liquid poison, absinthe. If there was any one in this world whom I desired to wreck mentally and physically, I would cultivate in him a taste for absinthe. It is a most seductive drink,—a fondness for it is easily acquired, and once acquired nothing on earth can cure. So, whatever you do individually, my boy, avoid absinthe. Of course, if young Barrow should choose to imbibe it,—and I understand it is a very popular drink in France,—you can warn him casually of the probable results, but you are not in a position to assume any of the responsibility of his actions. Another piece of advice for your personal consideration: Homburg is a fashionable watering-place, which Ralph will, most undoubtedly, desire to visit. Let me forewarn you that the baths of Homburg are simply the ostensible attractions. It is the great gaming hell of Europe,—a place harmless enough to a young man with an unlimited fortune, such as Ralph Barrow's, but remember that, though he may spend his thousands there with perfect impunity, you are poor, and must live according to your very limited means. I believe now I have said enough. I preferred giving you my parting injunctions in private, and, of course, in confidence, for you know women understand but poorly how men of the world and in the world are compelled to act; and if you were to assume toward Ralph Barrow the position my good wife assigned you, you would simply make an enemy of him for life, and do no one any good. I hope you fully understand me." And John Reynard looked across the table at James Reynard steadily, with a look so full of meaning in his wicked, black eyes that if any doubt of his meaning remained on his brother's mind, that look would have annihilated it forever.

"Yes, I understand," was all his reply in words, but his mental tablets bore this memorandum:

I am to lead Ralph Barrow into every species of temptation. I am to encourage him to get through with as much of his money as possible. I am to take him to the gambling hells of Europe, and feed him on absinthe, for all of which kind services I am to be rewarded with the hand of his sister Helen.

CHAPTER XXVI.

NO ONE TO BLAME.

So it came about that just as Ralph Barrow was taking leave of his Alma Mater, who had been most truly a "benign mother" to him, imposing no impossible tasks, demanding no arduous application, indulgent to laxity, after the manner of mothers, Mr. James Reynard made his appearance on the scene, bringing with him letters of introduction to young Barrow from his stepfather and mother. These letters simply conveyed to Ralph the idea that by a coincidence of desires Mr. James Reynard had conceived the intention of making a European tour at the same time with himself, that he was a lively, agreeable young man, and would prove a genial companion, and recommended him to Ralph as a most desirable fellow-traveler.

Ralph possessed too much of his father's honest, unsuspicious nature to entertain a dislike to the bearer of these letters simply because he was the brother of the stepfather toward whom he still felt so bitterly, so he gave Mr. James Reynard a cordial welcome that was characteristic of himself as a generous-hearted boy and a whole-souled Southerner.

Emancipated from all college restraint, Ralph started out buoyant and joyous to "see life," as he said, "and to have one real jolly year of it before he settled down as a business man."

Paris, that wonder of the world, that bright, glittering, dazzling light that has lured so many thousand poor, fluttering moths to destruction and death, beckoned to him with her ten thousand seductive and irresistible fascinations. He went, and was soon plunged in the vortex of Parisian gayeties. He had plenty of money and no one to restrain him; he was seeing life—seeing it with a vengeance. He very soon formed a coterie of fast spirits, who flattered him to his face, ate his suppers, drank fine wines at his expense, won his money from him at the card-table, then enjoyed behind his back the exquisite pleasure of laughing at the "American freshman," the "Southern swell," who spent his money on them so freely and swallowed their fulsome flattery so greedily. And all the time, quiet and watchful, Mephistopheles Reynard kept closely at his side, uttering little suggestive remonstrances that served only to irritate Ralph by a suspicion of attempted authority, and acted as fuel to the flames.

All the mad, wild pleasures of the mad, wild city, Ralph would see—must enjoy. What everybody in Paris did, Ralph would do. Such was his declaration of independence when James Reynard mildly asked him "if he did not think he was going it at too rapid a pace."

The question was asked as the two sat over a late breakfast in a fashionable café one morning, after a night of more than usual dissipation on Ralph's part.

"Mr. Reynard," replied the young man, drawing himself up loftily, "were you sent over here by my stepfather, your respected brother, to act as a spy upon my actions and play mentor? or did you come, as you professed to do, merely to prosecute your travels at the same time?"

"My dear Ralph," said James, hastily, "I hope what I said gave no offense; of course I am not here 'as a spy or mentor,' equally of course I have no desire to interfere with your enjoyments, only, my dear boy, as your senior, I thought I might safely venture on a word of friendly advice,—I considered that the family connection subsisting between us warranted so much; besides, my desire to act according to your dear mother's parting injunction may have caused me to overstep the limits of my privileges."

"And pray, what might have been the 'parting injunction of my dear mother'?" asked Ralph, with a sneer.

"In your present frame of mind, Ralph, it would only anger you to hear it, and prejudice you still more against me as a companion." This was scientific; for he knew that it would make the already irritated boy determined to hear it.

"I insist upon hearing what injunctions my mother saw fit to give a perfect stranger concerning me, sir," replied Ralph, angrily.

"My dear Ralph, it is nothing to grow angry over: only as I was telling my sister-in-law good-by she begged me, earnestly, 'to take good care of her boy, and keep him out of temptation.'"

The effect was exactly what James Reynard anticipated. Ralph grew purple with rage, and swelled with all the insane wrath of adolescent manhood at any insult offered its newly-fledged dignity.

"Let me give you to understand, Mr. Reynard, once and for all, that I am my own master, will do as I please, and spend just as much money as I please; if you propose assuming any authority over me, we had best part company right here; if you desire to continue in my company," he continued, loftily, "as a traveling companion, you are perfectly welcome, sir."

"My dear Mr. Barrow," replied James, diplomatically, "of course I do not desire to assume any authority over you; neither my position nor my years would

warrant such an attempt. I inadvertently alluded to some words spoken by your mother in a natural burst of maternal anxiety concerning you,—words which were certainly never intended for your ears, and which I am sorry you compelled me to repeat, for it will be hard now for me to disabuse your mind of the idea that I had a twofold object in this journey; and if such an idea once gains a foothold with you, it will put an end to that free and easy intercourse which has hitherto subsisted between us.”

“Not at all, not at all,” replied Ralph, whose anger was always short-lived, and he generously extended his hand across the table in token of amity; “as friends we can get along together first-rate; but I have no notion of being tied to my mother’s apron strings even by proxy. Maybe,” he continued, in a soberer voice, “if she had been a tenderer or more attentive mother in my early childhood when I needed her care and affection most, I should not be so independent of them now; but as far back as I can recollect, mother was but a careless, cold parent, who seemed to look upon Helen and myself as incumbrances of which she could not rid herself. She left me to take care of myself when I was a child,—and any anxiety on the score of my ability to do so now seems rather misplaced if not hypocritical,” he concluded, bitterly.

“My dear Ralph, you are surely mistaken,” began Mr. Reynard.

“No, sir, I am not mistaken,” interrupted Ralph; “all the love and care and kindness that Helen and myself knew as children came from father and poor Aunt Becky and my darling little Bertha, who is at this moment the most precious thing the world holds for me.”

The conversation was taking a sentimental tone which did not at all suit Mr. Reynard’s turn of mind.

“My dear boy,” he said, noticing the young man’s untasted breakfast, “you have no appetite this morning; late hours are beginning to tell on you; take some

bitters of some sort,—something to give you an appetite: you really look pale this morning.”

“What shall it be?” asked Ralph, indifferently, playing with the spoon of his untasted chocolate. “I am not ashamed to acknowledge that I do feel most deucedly knocked up this morning. Call for something, I don’t care what.”

“A little absinthe,” said the tool, “is the best appetizer I know of; but, my dear Ralph, at the risk of making you angry again, I must forewarn you that although one of the most seductive of drinks, it is at the same time one of the most dangerous, though you are hardly likely to become a regular absinthe-drinker.”

This was neat. To recommend a drink to a young man who is avowedly on the search for seductive pleasures as “seductive but dangerous,” is certainly all-sufficient commendation.

Ralph called for absinthe. James Reynard, to his credit be it said, saw him drink his first glass with qualms of conscience that might have led to good results if he had had a more tractable victim to deal with; but, unfortunately, Ralph’s dogged obstinacy and scornful repudiation of all interference only sealed his own doom.

Under the influence of the “appetizer,” Ralph’s digestive organs revived wonderfully, and with his restored appetite he recovered perfect good humor.

“Reynard,” he exclaimed, as, cigars in mouth, they sauntered out of the café, “don’t you think we’ve seen about enough of this Babel? Where shall we go? Name the place, and I’ll agree.”

“I think,” said his companion, “that a change to some watering-place would be the best renovator for you. You’ve been doing Paris a little too rapidly; suppose we try Homburg; according to the advertisements, it’s the most charming of terrestrial paradises, what with its mountains and fountains, and oaks and pines, and mineral springs, and——”

“That’s enough,” said Ralph. “Homburg is the place.”

So to Homburg they went,—tool and victim.

For the first week or two of his sojourn there, Ralph shared in the varied amusements of the place tolerably impartially, but it was not long before the magnificent Kursaal, with its wealth of Florentine architecture, its gilded walls, its rich mirrors, and satin curtains, had attracted the attention of the young American, who entered the temple of fortune at first from a curious desire to see wherein lay the immense fascination that could lead prince and peer and titled dame to elbow and jostle round the roulette-table with artisans and laborers and gamblers.

He went and saw, and was conquered. Rouge-et-noir and roulette became the business of Ralph Barrow's life,—drinking absinthe his recreation.

The small proportion of sober visitors at Homburg, who were not devotees in the Kursaal, and who had time to indulge in the unique employment of moralizing, looked on with pity at the mad young American who was making way with his brains and his money at such a fearful pace, while they spoke with profound admiration of the steady, quiet young man who kept so faithfully by the side of his wild friend, and tried so earnestly to win him from the error of his ways.

Yes, patiently and quietly the tool followed the victim from point to point, never failing to utter little plaintive remonstrances at a time when he knew they would be most likely to inflame the boy's passions, and exasperate him to new excesses.

Faithfully he reported progress to his brother by letter, and each letter was a model of propriety and well-assumed interest for the poor young man whose downward career he was evidently watching with such exceeding pain, and trying to check with such virtuous ardor.

These letters were kept from Mrs. Reynard, as they were naturally calculated to lacerate her maternal heart most cruelly; but finally, when the year of

travel had almost expired, there came one of such alarming terror that Dr. Reynard felt compelled to show it to the young profligate's mother.

The letter was written from Paris, to which place they had returned after their wanderings, and it was written in genuine fright by Mr. James Reynard, who had obeyed the implied instructions with which his brother had sent him forth, without fully conceiving the inevitable consequences. The consequences were beginning to show now, and the tool, who did not possess half the genius nor any of the cold blood of his wonderful brother, began to tremble at the mischief he had helped to bring about.

"Dear John," ran the letter, "I wish either you or Mrs. Reynard would come on and try to prevail upon Ralph to return home. I have been at him incessantly for the last two months to induce him to start for America, but only get curses and abuse for my pains. He is in a very strange condition mentally, and I have called in the very best physicians to him, but he refuses to have anything done for him.

"I would describe his condition as one of settled melancholy. His face is sad, his eyes sunken and sorrowful. He has not been sick, and yet when he stands up, or tries to walk, his limbs tremble as if from extreme weakness. He will sit for hours at a time without speaking, unless spoken to, and then his memory seems to be at fault about a great many events of very recent date. His condition is to me most alarming, although the doctors say perfect quiet and the discontinuance of all ardent drinks will restore him in a short time. As I have no authority over him, I cannot insure either; so you will please either come on yourself or request his mother to do so immediately on receipt of this.

"JAMES REYNARD."

This letter reached Aland in due course of time, and was read by Dr. Reynard,—I will not say with abso-

lute satisfaction, but at least without one pulsation of regret or remorse.

He was in the library when the mail was brought to him, and, after reading it, he rang the bell and requested the boy who answered it to tell his mistress that he should like to see her immediately.

Mrs. Reynard obeyed the summons promptly, as she generally did obey summons from Dr. Reynard.

"My dear," began the self-made man, looking exceedingly grave as Agnes seated herself on the opposite side of the table at which he was sitting, "for some time past I have been receiving letters from James, which have made me feel uneasy about Ralph; but, as I knew all young men, and especially all wealthy young men, had a certain quantity of wild oats to sow, I have deemed it best not to disturb your peace of mind by showing you those letters; in short, Ralph has acquired a taste for drinking, and I am afraid, from what James writes me, he is carrying it to rather an unusual excess."

"I thought James was sent over to prevent that," said Mrs. Reynard, shortly.

"We hoped, my love, that James might be a restraining influence, but for some time past he has been writing me word that Ralph would not brook the slightest interference on his part. I suppose the difference in their ages was too slight."

"Well," said his wife, "what does this letter say? give it to me."

Dr. Reynard handed the letter over. Agnes Reynard read therein the intelligence that her first-born and only son was bordering on lunacy, that he was nearly a wreck, mentally and physically.

Her face was white and frightened as she glanced up at her husband when she had finished reading it.

"You must go for him immediately," she said.

"I rather think, my dear Agnes, that you would be the most fitting person to go. In one of James's earliest letters, written very soon after he joined your son,

he repeated some expressions of Ralph's which makes me think that I am the last person who could hope to influence him in any way. Remember that your son is very nearly of age. His next birthday he will be twenty-one; he scorned my authority when a mere boy, and it is not likely he will submit to it now when he is a man. There is nothing for it but for you to go on for him yourself, my dear Agnes, and while there, it will probably be best for you to bring Helen home too. It will be altering our plans for her somewhat, but Ralph will find his plantation home so insufferable after his gay life abroad, that in order to keep him satisfied, we will have to make that home as attractive as possible. I think Helen, with her vivacity, and Bertha's entrancing music, will help us in our object."

Mrs. Reynard knew that his arguments in favor of her going and his staying were unanswerable, because perfectly true, so there was nothing for it but for her to make hurried preparation to go on after the heir of Aland.

"My dear," said Dr. Reynard, before closing the interview, "I think it will be best not to let any of the household know that you are going on for Ralph especially, for the sea voyage and the change of his style of living may entirely restore him before he reaches home, and by keeping silence a great deal of annoying gossip will be avoided."

"I am not likely to advertise the world of the fact that my son has turned out a drunkard," said Mrs. Reynard, sharply.

"Don't put it so harshly, my love; Ralph is simply suffering temporarily from too free indulgence in those pleasures in which every young man of means and fashion participates. A few months of retirement and perfect abstemiousness is all that is required to restore him to robust health," replied her husband, truthfully.

Bertha was a little astonished, and very much delighted, when informed that her aunt had suddenly resolved to bring the "children" home.

In less than a week after James Reynard's letter had reached Aland, Mrs. Reynard was on her way to New York. Dr. Reynard accompanied her that far, polite and attentive,—regretting the necessity that compelled him to remain behind, but affirming that in the boy's present condition the sight of the stepfather who had always been so obnoxious to him might have a most disastrous effect.

His parting words were replete with the spirit of Christian forbearance :

“Do not reproach your boy, my dear wife. Deal kindly with him. Win him to talk to you freely and fearlessly. And above all, do not allow your own spirits to become depressed. Remember, my love, he is suffering but temporarily from youthful excesses,—excesses for which no one is to blame, and for which he is much to be pitied.” No ! no one was to blame !

It was simply Homburg plus absinthe plus James Reynard plus John Reynard equaling a poor wrecked boy. Ah ! where was the God of the orphan ?

CHAPTER XXVII.

FANCIES NOT FACTS.

THE period which Rosine Chevreul, the French governess, and Bertha Lombard spent alone at Aland, pending the coming of the heir and heiress of the place, short as it was, was afterwards looked back upon by Rosine Chevreul as the brightest and happiest episode of her life.

Becky's child had grown up to be as lovely in person as in character. She had inherited all the beauty of her aunts with all the admirable characteristics which had made Rebecca Snowe so sterling a woman.

Tall and graceful, as her Aunt Agnes had been before her, she combined, with the dignified stateliness inherited from that lady, the affectionate warmth of her mother's disposition, which prevented her dignity degenerating into that stiff hauteur which had made Agnes Snowe so repellant. Instead of the cold, gray eyes of the Snowe family, she had the large, lustrous brown ones which had so beautified Dr. Lombard's otherwise plain face. She possessed her Aunt Julia's diminutive, pretty hands and feet, but was blessed with the good sense and the desire to make those little hands of some use in the world. Her crown of glory was a wealth of wavy chestnut-brown hair, which she must surely have inherited from some unknown Lombard ancestor; for there was nothing to compare with it in any member of the Snowe family. Add to this catalogue of personal charms a pair of delicious dimples that trembled and quivered around a mouth always ready for sweet smiles and gentle words, and you have a faithful portrait of Becky Lombard's child.

Nature seemed to have taken a fancy to compensate for the plainness which had been the mother's portion in youth, by bestowing upon the daughter all the beautiful features and desirable characteristics that had been scattered among the various members of the family for so long; and the *tout-ensemble* made a most lovely and lovable girl.

Bertha was far too pretty to meet with her aunt's cordial indorsement.

She was wonderfully useful to Mrs. Reynard,—so useful, in fact, that the idea of having to do without her would not have been tolerated for a moment by that lady. Old Dora, the factotum of Aland, had been reduced by time to a querulous, purblind, almost useless old grumbler. Her mantle of usefulness had fallen upon Bertha's pretty shoulders, and as the young girl had inherited her mother's energy with her domestic tastes, she wore the mantle gracefully and

cheerfully. She carried the keys, helped with the preserving and pickling, superintended the dairies, and withal was such a bright, cheery, amiable little house-keeper that her sway was submitted to cheerfully and lovingly by the simple-hearted slaves over whom she reigned so gently. There was no doubt that Bertha was absolutely indispensable at Aland, but Mrs. Reynard would have been much better pleased if, with all her usefulness, she had been several shades less ornamental.

In her relations as pupil Bertha was no less lovable. Bright and attentive, loving study dearly and loving her gentle, pretty instructress dearly also, the school-hours were very happy ones, both to Rosine Chevreul and Bertha.

Rosine Chevreul was of a fiery, passionate nature,—burdened with a secret sorrow, suffering from bitter memories. Bertha Lombard was of a pure, bright nature, rendered patient and charitable by early sorrow,—looking back with chastened regret over a sad but sinless past,—looking forward buoyantly and hopefully to the unknown future which youth always fills to repletion with blessings bright and manifold.

The intercourse between these two did them good mutually. Bertha cheered Rosine and Rosine's sadness brought Bertha's loving charity into active play.

Loving each other dearly, they were nowise loath to be left dependent upon each other for company when the master and mistress of Aland started out on their journey.

They buzzed around the house as busy as two little bees all day long, for Bertha had undertaken to see that Ralph's and Helen's rooms should be renovated and aired and beautified, and rendered worthy of the two superior mortals whom her loving heart declared to be so very, very superior. Ralph's room occupied her most earnest attention. The pillow-slips on which his dear head was to rest must be the most daintily ruffled and the most neatly fluted ones the linen-closet

afforded. The pink Marseilles quilt must go on his French bedstead, because the plain white looked so chilly and cold. The great morocco chair, which stood in the library, must be wheeled into Ralph's room, because that used to belong to Uncle Barrow, and it would please Ralph to use it for his very own now. The watch-case, which she had made with her own deft little fingers, was hung in a conspicuous place over the mantelpiece, for Ralph was a man now and, of course, he carried a watch. Everything that a loving heart or woman's head could think of was thought of to insure the comfort and to give token of affectionate forethought for Bertha's coming hero.

Ralph's room was in "apple-pie order," as she informed Miss Chevreul, and the key to the door was jingling in her key-basket weeks and weeks before they could possibly be expected home; and there was very little left to do but to wait, and of all hard things to do that is certainly the hardest for a young, impatient soul, especially when that soul is filled to the brim with pure, ardent affection for the expected ones.

"Tell me what they are both like, Bertha," said Rosine one day, more to give the young girl an excuse for talking on her favorite theme than from any great curiosity she entertained on the subject.

"What are they like?" replied Bertha, with alacrity. "Oh, I expect they must be very much changed personally, but I hope not in any other way, for I shouldn't like them half so well if they were. Well, Cousin Helen, when she went away, was the brightest, sweetest, most winsome little pug-nosed monkey you ever saw. She used to have her own way with everything and everybody, yet she managed it so that she never gave offense to any. If she thought she had hurt any one's feelings by a quick word or inconsiderate action, she would put her little chubby arms around one's neck, and say she was sorry for it so sweetly that it made one feel like eating her up."

"Does she resemble her mother in any respect?" asked the governess.

"Oh, she's not the least bit dignified, nor cold, nor stately," replied Bertha; "in fact, I think aunt would prefer her being more so. Aunt used to call her the incorrigible; but, of course, all that is past and gone. Aunt Verzenay is such an elegant lady that I expect she has polished poor little Helen out of all recognition."

"Has she corresponded with you regularly?"

"No," said Bertha, reluctantly, "she has not. At first she did, and her letters were very sweet and cousinly; but latterly she has never written to me directly, and the cold little messages I receive through aunt's letters make me think the Cousin Helen who is coming is not the Cousin Helen that I knew."

"And what about Cousin Ralph?" said Miss Chevreul, looking up from her embroidery with a meaning smile.

"Oh, Cousin Ralph is just the dearest, handsomest, bravest boy that ever lived!" replied the young girl, fearlessly. "He has not changed,—he cannot change. The last letter he wrote me was just as kind, just as affectionate, as the very first."

"How long since you received that last one?" asked Rosine, solely to give the child an excuse for continuing her pet subject.

"Oh, you know," cried Bertha, womanlike, quick to apologize for her love before any apology was asked, "since he has been traveling I have not looked for letters, for he was coming home so soon; and it must be so inconvenient to keep writing letters home from every little place one stops at."

Thus encouraged, Bertha would ramble on for hours about the two cousins who occupied so entirely the heart left vacant by the death of her father, mother, and grandfather. She was drawing fancy pictures and presenting them to Miss Chevreul for true portraits, for she was drawing her pictures of Ralph and Helen Barrow from memory, and memory's pictures,

touched up by a bright and loving fancy, make very attractive portraits, indeed. How these fancies will compare with the facts we shall soon see.

Bertha was happy with bright anticipations. Rosine was cheerful from sympathy, and because for the time being she was relieved of the leaden weight under which Mrs. Reynard's repellant manners crushed her, and of the dangerous presence of the man,—the one being now on earth who could force her to think of her drear, dead past.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MADemoiselle HÉLÈNE BARROW.

A TELEGRAM from New York, at which point Dr. Reynard awaited the return of his family, had reached Aland, specifying the very day on which they might be expected to reach Aland. Bertha fluttered around on the momentous morning in a perfect quiver of excitement. The carriages had been started off to meet the boat hours and hours before the very earliest moment at which it had ever been known to arrive. The daintiest bouquets were gathered and placed in the two rooms destined for Ralph and Helen. Of course, they must be terribly literary; so she scattered books with careful carelessness about their apartments. She gave a tender little pat to each faultlessly spread bed, and then wished she could find something else to do to show the dear ones who were coming how dear they really were. "I wonder," she murmured softly as she closed the door upon the flowers and books, "if Ralphy will think the flowers sweet *because* I gathered them for him. I wonder if the watch-case will look pretty

to him *because* I made it for him," and she grew pink with her loving conjectures.

Then she ran in search of Aunt Dora to ask for the twentieth time if she could think of no addition to the bill of fare which she had ordered for the travelers' dinner, from the elaborate nature of which one might infer than the Barrows had been on starvation diet in the desert of Sahara for at least six months.

But the elaborate dinner was cooked to cinders in the waiting, for, with a perversity that was certainly human in its malice, the boat came hours later than she had ever been known to come before.

Even Bertha's angelic patience gave way under the delay. She conjured up a thousand accidents in the space of twenty minutes. The boat had blown up—the vessel had been wrecked before they reached New York—the horses had run away with them after they had landed——

"But, my dear Bertha," interrupted Miss Chevreul, with her sad half smile, "wouldn't it be a remarkable coincidence if the carriage-horses, the buggy-horses, and the van-horses should all run away at once?"

"Oh, I know I haven't an ounce of reason in me, dear Miss Chevreul. But I'm so anxious to see them I can't help fidgeting a little bit. Kiss me, and I'll try to be patient."

The governess's pale lips trembled as she pressed them to Bertha's sweet, pure lips: "We've been so happy here together, child, that I dread the coming of these fashionable cousins."

Before Bertha had time to reply, the sound of wheels was heard, and she bounded forward to greet her beloved cousins, dragging the reluctant governess with her.

In front of the large gate at the end of the lauria-mundi avenue stood the open baggage-van piled to a mountainous height with huge trunks and boxes and valises.

"What mountains of baggage!" exclaimed Bertha, in astonishment.

At this moment, a female, all flounces and frills and ribbons, appeared from amid the huge trunks where she had apparently lain perdu, and scrambled awkwardly to the ground, where she commenced a vigorous shaking and pulling and smoothing out of her ruffled plumage, looking at her dusty shoes and crumpled flounces with a most rueful expression of countenance.

Miss Chevreul and Bertha watched these evolutions of the unknown with wondering eyes.

"Can that be Helen?" asked Bertha, opening her brown eyes to their widest extent; "it would be just like her," she added, merrily, "to come home in the baggage-wagon if the carriage was too close for her." With which words she sprang down the steps to meet the beflooned young female, who had entered the gate and was tripping up the long walk with a finikin, mincing step which excited Bertha's risibles almost beyond control. They advanced toward each other, staring at each other like two strange cats. Bertha vainly seeking for some trace of a likeness to Helen Barrow in the advancing stranger, who, in her turn, was gazing with inward admiration at the beautiful young lady gliding toward her so gracefully. "Who are you, anyhow?" asked Bertha, coming to an abrupt pause a few paces off from the young female; for she knew that broad, good-humored face, those small, twinkling black eyes, and that mass of coarse, coal-black hair could not belong to her Cousin Helen. Whatever else France and Madame Verzenay might have accomplished in the way of metamorphosing the Helen Barrow she had known, they could not have changed the color of her hair and eyes. "Who are you, anyhow?" she asked again, and she of the flounces, answering the puzzled inquiry of Miss Lombard's eyes rather than the words which conveyed very little of the young lady's meaning to her foreign senses, said, by way of self-introduction,—

"I have Mademoiselle Hélène Barrow's femme de chambre." And the poor French maid, having used up

her entire stock of English in an abortive attempt to Anglicize her verb, relapsed into silence.

"Oh, you have, have you?" replied Bertha, breaking into a merry little laugh of genuine amusement. "Well, take her into the house."

But the bewildered Frenchwoman failed to glean any meaning from Bertha's reply, and Bertha being mistress only of that sort of cabinet French which enabled her to write her French exercises correctly, and translate her "*Charles XII.*" without disgracing herself, did not care to make herself ridiculous in the eyes of Helen's maid by returning English-French for her French-English, so she merely beckoned toward the veranda, where Miss Chevreul stood watching them, and called out merrily to her governess, "Miss Rosine, please call this poor French goose there, and tell her what to do with herself, I can't talk to her; and please tell her too which are Mademoiselle H  l  ne *Barrow's* rooms,—I suppose that's French for Cousin Helen. Don't I wish I could roll my r's as she does; it sounds like distant thunder."

Miss Chevreul called the French girl toward her, and Bertha passed on to the gate to look down the road for the other vehicles.

The boy who had driven the baggage-cart was busy unloading it, and placing the immense trunks inside the gate on the white gravel-walk, whose purity no vehicle was ever allowed to tarnish. The last trunk had been deposited on the gravel, and the cart was empty; but the boy still stood there holding a small morocco satchel in his hands, and looking the picture of perplexity and distress when Bertha came up.

"Miss Bertha," he said, raising his cap from his head respectfully, "what you call this yer thing I'se holdin'?—please, ma'am."

"Why, Gus, I call it a satchel," said Bertha, looking at him in surprise.

"Well, then, Miss Bertha, I done loss something, sho'," he said, scratching his head in token of per-

plexity, and peering again over the sides of the empty van.

"Why do you think so, Gus? Surely my cousins couldn't have brought home any more baggage than that." And she turned to survey the regiment of trunks which was marshaled in the avenue.

"Oh, them's all the trunks," said Gus, positively, "an' I didn't see nothin' more'n this yer little bag; but missy, she say, 'Gus, you goes ahead wid my trunks an' my fam-shom;' and, Miss Berthy, ma'am, ef this yer little bag ain't the fam-shom, I done loss it, sho'."

Bertha's laugh rang out clearly and merrily. Gus looked on in stolid unconsciousness of the point of the joke, but felt reassured, nevertheless, for he knew Miss Bertha was too kind to laugh at him if there was real cause for anxiety. He waited, therefore, patiently, cap in hand, until the laughing girl assured him that he had lost nothing, and that the *femme de chambre* had carried itself into the house.

"Oh," said Gus, grinning from ear to ear in relief and in amusement, "I thought that was missy's French gal!" Saying which he sprang on to the van and drove off to the stable-yard with a heart at ease.

Then Bertha turned her eager glance toward the direction that the carriages must come from. They were coming at last. Mrs. Reynard's carriage hove in sight first, and, as it drew near, Bertha's eager eyes detected the figures of three persons only,—her aunt, her cousin, and Mr. James Reynard, who had accompanied the travelers home from Europe. The driver drew rein, and the nice young man, who had come home polished to the superlative degree of niceness, sprang lightly down, and held out a daintily-gloved hand to assist the ladies in alighting.

Mrs. Reynard descended first, pale, cold, and stately. She greeted Bertha with a little frozen kiss, and passed on into the house.

Then a butterfly fluttered to the ground,—a gorgeous

butterfly,—in high-heeled, tasseled boots, skirts of fashionable brevity, huge ribbons that couldn't flutter if they would for very richness and heaviness, a wonderful suit of hair, surmounted by a still more wonderful hat, which maintained an almost perfectly perpendicular position, with no visible support but the bridge of the butterfly's nose, which was the greatest wonder of all.

All these items Bertha's quick and wondering glance took in in a marvelously short space of time; then the butterfly stood on tiptoe and offered her cheek French fashion to her cousin to be kissed, saying,—

"And this is Berthe (Bairt), my pretty Cousine Berthe; I am so charmed, *ma chère*, to see you once more." This in a patronizing voice, that suggested twenty-five years of seniority on the part of the butterfly.

"And this is Cousin Helen," replied "Bairt," hardly knowing whether to cry or to laugh.

"'Hélène,' my dear Berthe, if you please,—my ears have grown so unused to that good old-fashioned name 'Helen' that I do not intend letting any one fasten it upon me again; so 'Hélène,' if you please, 'Hélène.'"

Bertha was quite decided by this time as to what she should like to do,—she should like to enjoy a hearty laugh; but good manners forbade, so she only smiled polite acquiescence.

"And, Susanne?" inquired Mademoiselle Hélène, "she has arrived, I presume?"

"Your 'fam-shom,' as Gus calls her?" said Bertha, with a merry twinkle in her eye. "Yes, she is here; and oh! cousin, I'm so glad she has so sensible a name as 'Susan.' I was fully prepared for 'Rosalie,' or 'Natalie,' or 'Annette,' or 'Jeannette,' which, I believe, is a standard name for French nursery-maids and grizettes; but 'Susan,'—anybody can say that; oh, it's quite a relief!" said malicious Bairt.

"Susanne, my dear Berthe, if you please,—the accent on the last syllable, if you please. But let us

move on into the house," said this highly-accented young female.

"Oh, I want to wait for Ralph," said Bertha, honestly. "I see the dog-cart coming now; but how slowly! One would imagine somebody was sick in it," she continued, looking anxiously at the advancing vehicle.

"No, there is no one sick. There's no one in the dog-cart but Papa Reynard and Ralph; and Ralph, as usual, is under the influence of liquor," said Helen, coarsely and carelessly.

"What!" exclaimed Bertha, recoiling with horror, "Ralph, my Cousin Ralph, a drunkard!"

"What a fine tragedy queen you would make!" said Helen, with a touch of her mother's cool insolence. "I don't know that because a young man of wealth and fashion chooses to indulge occasionally to excess he need be called a drunkard."

"But, Helen, you said 'as usual.'"

"Possibly,—I am not in the habit of weighing and pruning my words before giving them utterance; come, Mr. Reynard, we will go into the house."

Bertha stood alone waiting for the advancing vehicle. "As I feared," she murmured; "they have educated all the soul out of her, polished her heart into a rock. Oh, Ralph! am I to be so bitterly disappointed in you too? will you come mincing and mowing at me with your French nonsense, not even recollecting your own name, or being able to pronounce mine?"

The dog-cart stopped, and Dr. Reynard, alighting first, turned to help his stepson from the vehicle. Bertha stood in the large gateway, looking on in pale-faced wonderment.

Could that decrepit-looking feeble man, whose complexion was waxen and yellow, whose dim eyes were sunken far back in his head, whose hands trembled like an old man's when he extended them to his stepfather for assistance, be her Cousin Ralph?—the brave,

dashing boy who had left his home buoyant with hope and bounding with health,—was that Ralph? Could it be him? Could drink have done it?

She sprang toward the two men with outstretched hands.

Ralph, seeing a young lady in front of him, instinctively raised his hat and made her a courteous bow.

"Oh, Ralph! Ralph!" cried Bertha, in a voice choked with sobs, "don't you know me? It is I, Bertha, Ralph dear, your Cousin Bertha, that loves you so dearly." And she placed her two little hands upon the young man's shoulders and compelled him to look her in the face. The light of a loving recognition came into Ralph Barrow's dull, sunken eyes. He was evidently struggling with memory. "It is Bertha, Ralph," repeated the young girl, softly, fixing his eye with a steady glance. "Cousin Bertha, who loves you. Don't you know me?"

"Know Cousin Bertha? My little Bertha? Yes, God bless her. Certainly I know her; who says I don't, sir?" And the broken boy clasped his cousin in a feeble embrace, and pressed his white lips to her fresh, rosy ones.

Dr. Reynard, who was watching this scene curiously, made a mental memorandum:

"She is the one who could most readily influence him. Her voice has done more toward arousing memory than any he has heard since his return. *She is to be kept away from him.*"

Disengaging herself from his arms, Bertha drew one of his trembling hands through her arm, and thus the two proceeded toward the house, the feeble, tottering man leaning on the strong, brave girl for support. Helen watched their advance from the window of her mother's bedroom.

"Bertha has gotten over her horror of the drunkard with wonderful rapidity," she said, with a sneer.

Mrs. Reynard replied never a word; she was thinking!

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE ALAND HOUSEHOLD.

THE household at Aland was assuredly composed of the most incongruous elements that were ever brought together within the circumscribed limits of one family.

We have all seen the "happy family" in the menageries, consisting of an Angora cat, a dog, a monkey, a couple of birds, and some white mice, all living together, in perfect amity, in one cage, and treating each other with the most distinguished courtesy. So much for training and civilization.

The Aland cage contained a couple of foxes that answered to the names of John and James respectively; a vain and stately peafowl, who consorted lovingly with the elder of the foxes; a gorgeous foreign butterfly, known in its chrysalis state as "Helen," but more recently as Hélène Barrow; a tender little ringdove called Bertha, and a tigerish woman, from whose passionate soul all that was trusting and bright had been swept away by one dark, irremediable step, which had left her sly, watchful, and suspicious.

But see again what training and civilization can do. The foxes, and the peafowl, and the butterfly, and the ringdove, and the tigress all lived together in perfect amity in one cage and treated each other with the most distinguished courtesy. The fox called the peafowl "my dear, and my love," and the peafowl accorded him, in return, the most unquestioning submission. The tigress trembled in the presence of the fox, but was politely deferential to the peafowl, who, in her turn, treated the tigress with chilling courtesy. The butterfly hovered lovingly around the elder fox,

but treated the younger one with the capricious kindness of an accomplished coquette, luring him on with airs and graces when sullen despair took possession of him, and then fluttering out of reach when he threatened an advance; while my pretty ringdove, gentle and cheerful as ever, went her own way in their midst, to all seeming placid and care-free, but her loving heart was uttering a voiceless lament for its chosen mate, that had come back to her bruised and wounded nigh unto death.

Bertha Lombard—to drop metaphor—was too genuinely unselfish, and was, withal, too pre-eminently qualified for a ministering angel, to shrink away from her unfortunate cousin's side. She saw his helplessness, she knew not what had brought him to so miserable a condition, she knew only that he needed kindness and gentle treatment, and from her he should have them, if from none other in the household.

Helen's treatment of her brother filled Bertha with astonishment and indignation. It was a mixture of indifference, contempt, and aversion.

He came to her one morning soon after his arrival at home, and essayed to put his arms around her. She pushed him pettishly from her, and raised her hands to smooth her crumpled collar.

"Helen, how can you?" exclaimed Bertha, indignantly.

"How can I?" exclaimed the spoiled girl, willfully. "Do you suppose, Bertha, I want a boy who has brought himself almost to a state of imbecility by the most disgraceful excesses to be caressing me forever? No, thanks, Ralph is not the brother I used to love. It makes my flesh creep to have his clammy arms round me."

Bertha turned to look at Ralph, who, upon his sister's repulse, had thrown himself upon a sofa. She hoped he had not understood the cruel words. But his mind was only partially clouded, and it was evident his sister's bitter words and angry looks had conveyed some

meaning to his poor, bewildered brain, for he bowed his head upon his two hands, and sat there a perfect picture of pain and mortification.

"My poor cousin!" said Bertha, tenderly, going up to him and laying her soft hand upon his bowed head. "Come, Ralph, you promised me to take a long walk." Together they passed from the room; for Ralph was always docilely obedient to any request coming from his Cousin Bertha.

Bertha had constituted herself his constant companion. She was conscious that she had great influence with him, and she hoped by winning him from his brooding ways, by talking to him incessantly of their childish past, and by keeping from him all stimulating drinks, she could restore him to himself.

If the young girl had been allowed to carry out her simple and loving régime for her cousin's restoration, she might have accomplished the desired object; but it was only apparent acquiescence that Dr. Reynard granted to her earnest request to "let her experiment on Ralph."

Ralph Barrow, as he was, was harmless enough, for he was utterly incapable of taking command of his estates. Ralph Barrow restored to reason would be an unpleasant member of the household and a disagreeable customer in business. Therefore Ralph Barrow had best remain as he was.

Bertha longed earnestly to know everything connected with Ralph's infirmity. She wanted to know how it began, what had produced it, what the European physicians said about it, everything about him she wanted to know, so that she could base her own operations on the plan most likely to insure success.

All the bright dreams she had dreamed of the happy life she and Helen and Ralph were to have led together at Aland had flown, and the mocking reality of Helen's frivolity and Ralph's almost imbecility stared her in the face in their stead.

As her mother would have done before her, she bravely buckled to the task of bettering that which was still in some degree remediable, and strove cheerfully to accept that which was not.

Ralph's condition she believed to be among the former, if somebody would only help her to the remedy.

She shrank from asking her Aunt Agnes what she thought of her son's condition; for, since bringing him home, Bertha had not heard her aunt mention his name to a third party. She treated the poor boy himself with cold, even kindness, leaving him nothing to desire in the way of personal comfort, but never striving to win him to talk to her, or bestowing on him any visible sign of affection.

In fact, Mrs. Reynard seemed to feel outraged against her son. He had brought discredit upon himself and upon her. She had sent him to Europe, expecting him to come back and overawe all her acquaintances with his splendid acquirements and elegant polish. He had come home a miserable, attenuated wreck of a man, with no acquirements and almost needing a keeper. She had expected to be proud of him, and he had compelled her to feel ashamed of him. She resented this, and she showed her resentment by treating him with the most repellant coolness. She rarely spoke to him, she never spoke of him, so Bertha knew that her questions about Ralph would meet with no favor there.

She must talk to Dr. Reynard, was her conclusion. But she found this much easier in theory than in practice. She never had grown quite familiar with her uncle-in-law. In fact, I think there was a natural antagonism between Bertha's pure and fearless soul and the crafty, dark nature of John Reynard. There was a little, quaint air of reserve about her when she was compelled to address him which was never otherwise noticeable. He noticed it, and she was conscious of it. He set it down to the natural awe inspired in a young and timid girl by the superiority of his charac-

ter and the dignity of his manners. She, if she had been compelled to put it into words, would probably have resolved it into the old rhyme,—

“I do not like you, Dr. Fell,
The reason why I cannot tell;
But only this I know full well,
I do not like you, Dr. Fell.”

But Ralph's condition made the matter of likes and dislikes of minor importance; so she boldly accosted him one morning as she was coming from the garden with a basket of flowers, and saw him standing on the veranda, with his hands in his pockets, gazing out idly and complacently over the lordly domain of which he was still—thanks to chance—temporary monarch.

“Uncle John,” began Bertha, timidly, as she stood before him, blushing as red as the monthly roses she held in her basket, “I want to ask you a few questions.”

“Well, my dear,” said the self-made man, in a tone of kind encouragement.

“They are all about Cousin Ralph,” said Bertha, pausing again.

“Well, my dear,” not quite so kindly this time.

“Uncle John, what do you suppose is the cause of his strange condition?”

“Drink,” was the laconic reply.

“But, Uncle John, other men have drunk to excess without producing such strange results.”

“Possibly,” said the physician; “other men have had yellow fever, and cholera, and been shot, and have gotten over it, while others, again, have died.”

Bertha had no answer for this, so she turned from cause to consequence.

“Do you think it likely to prove permanent, Uncle John?”

“My dear Bertha,” replied the physician, blandly, “who can tell what is in the future?—we can only hope for the best.”

"But I wanted your opinion," said the young girl, a little impatiently; "I do not want your hopes, I want your thoughts."

"My stepson has been at home so short a time," rejoined Dr. Reynard, "that it is impossible for me to have formed an opinion on his case."

"But what do the European doctors say about it?" continued Bertha, pertinaciously.

"You will remember," said Dr. Reynard, coldly, "that I did not go to Europe with my wife; and, as it is naturally a subject from which Mrs. Reynard shrinks, I have asked her as few questions as possible, preferring to wait for the development of symptoms, and then to treat according to my own judgment. Your flowers will wilt, my dear, if you do not place them in water immediately."

Bertha accepted this neatly-conveyed dismissal, and passed on into the house with her flowers, feeling convinced that she had extracted from her uncle-in-law all that he intended she should extract on the subject of his stepson.

"I will try Helen," murmured the devoted cousin. Then Bertha stooped to a little bit of stratagem; but I am Jesuitical enough to think that the end justified the means in this case.

She made a portion of the flowers she had intended for the parlor vases up into a pretty bouquet, and went with it to Miss Barrow's room. A little affected "entrez" was returned in answer to her knock, for no one on the premises dared enter the sacred precincts of Mademoiselle Hélène's chamber without a preliminary knock.

"Ah! is it you, Bertha? I thought it was Susanne." Miss Barrow was sitting in her dressing-gown, swinging her little slippered feet backward and forward impatiently, for she was waiting for Susanne to come and comb her hair, and Susanne was daring to keep her waiting; and her little royal highness was waxing wroth in consequence.

"No, it is only I," said Bertha, placing herself meekly below Susanne in point of importance. "See! I have brought you some flowers, cousin, for your vase."

"Thanks," said Miss Barrow, indifferently. "I do wish Susanne would come!"

"Where has she gone?" asked Bertha, sympathizing with the troubles of a young lady who had to sit full five minutes in a cushioned rocking-chair, waiting for a dilatory maid to come dress her hair.

"She has gone for my coffee," replied Helen, in a peevish voice.

"It is early yet," said Bertha, "and I expect she found none dripped. You know aunt always likes her coffee very hot, and Richard drips it late."

"But Richard *knows* I must have my coffee before breakfast; he knows I cannot live without it. At Aunt Verzenay's my coffee was always brought to me in bed; but people do not know how to live in this country,—they know nothing, they have nothing. Why, Aunt Verzenay's servants' houses are handsomer than this old shell. We don't live in this country, we breathe, we vegetate only." And Miss Barrow gave such a violent swing to her right foot that the little embroidered slipper fell to the ground.

Bertha glanced in genuine amusement at the young lady who was vegetating in a silk-faced cashmere morning-gown and embroidered slippers, and longed to say something saucy, but she had an object to gain and could not afford to be sarcastic.

"Let me comb your hair, Hélène; I expect Susanne is dripping your coffee herself."

That Hélène was a neat piece of diplomacy.

"Thanks," said her royal highness; "anything is better than waiting forever."

With this equivocal acceptance of her offer, Bertha laid the flowers in a basin of water and went to work on Helen's really beautiful hair.

"Cousin," said Bertha, as her deft little fingers

twisted and braided and pinned, "I want to ask you to tell me everything the European doctors said about Ralph's case. I want to know if they think his memory will ever be fully restored."

"How do I know, Bertha?" was the cold reply. "I was not with Ralph, and all I know about his case is what I heard Mr. Reynard tell mamma. I know I think it perfectly horrible and disgraceful that he should have drunk himself into a state of perfect imbecility at his time of life. It is shocking, disgusting! If he had been sick now, had brain fever, and lost his mind, one could pity him; but as it is, bah! I always did despise a man who drank."

"Oh, Helen, do not be so harsh! Help me, cousin, to win Ralph back to himself. We can do it, Helen, I feel sure; but not by cold looks nor harsh words. He wants kindness and encouragement, cousin."

"Mercy, Bertha, how you worry about Ralph! He wants nothing, but to be kept from his beloved wine bottles, and I think the best plan for us all to adopt is to show him that we despise the disgusting vice so much that we will have nothing to do with him so long as he clings to it. He is disgracing us, and I for one will not treat him as if he were an object of pity instead of censure."

This view of the case was so diametrically opposed to Bertha's own, that she felt instinctively she should never be able to convert Helen into a coadjutor in her loving plan of regeneration.

She left Helen's room none the wiser for her flowers, her hair dressing, or her little hypocritical "*Hélène*."

Mr. Reynard was her last resource. She would see if he would tell her what advice the foreign physicians had given concerning her cousin.

Obtaining the desired information from this quarter would involve one disagreeable necessity,—a *tête-à-tête* with Mr. James Reynard.

Now, whereas Bertha's dislike for Dr. Reynard was passive, undefined, almost intangible, her feelings to-

ward his brother were decided dislike and active contempt. She did not like the nice young man. She despised his want of manliness, she regarded him contemptuously as a mere parlor pet, only this and nothing more. But if he was the sole possessor of the knowledge she was so anxiously seeking from him, she must obtain it.

Chance favored her that very day. She was passing along the gallery that skirted the billiard-room, later in the evening, and saw through the open door that Mr. Reynard was the sole occupant of the room. He was knocking the balls about in a listless, aimless fashion, more in the vain effort to kill time, apparently, than in amusement.

His twinkling black eyes lighted up with pleased surprise as Bertha Lombard's graceful figure glided into the doorway.

"Mr. Reynard," she said, promptly, "I wish a few words with you, please."

"Certainly, my dear Miss Bertha." And, dropping his cue with alacrity, he advanced toward where she was standing.

Bertha, however, came forward into the room, and coolly seated herself on a sofa.

Mr. Reynard seated himself beside her on the same sofa.

"I want to ask you," said Bertha, going straight to the point, "to tell me, word for word, what the French physicians say about my Cousin Ralph's condition."

Mr. Reynard's face fell a little.

"Well, a—my dear Miss Lombard, I hardly know whether I can remember so minutely as you desire."

"Did they think this?"—Bertha dreaded the word "lunacy"—"did they think he might recover?"

The face upraised to James Reynard's was so sweet in its earnest pleading that he could not answer her with a lie.

"They thought he might recover, if"—he checked

himself. How far might he be acting against orders in telling the truth? How far might he be endangering his own prospects by interfering with his brother's? He would like to gratify the beautiful girl who was hanging so on his next words; but Bertha's gratification weighed lightly in the balance against John's wrath. He gave his unoffending moustache a fierce twist, and stared helplessly out the window over Bertha's head. You see, he was a villain, but such a poor, wishy-washy one that he made but an unserviceable tool.

"If what?" said Bertha, with eager impatience.

"Hang it, Miss Lombard," said the nice young man, springing to his feet in an agony of perplexity, "I've had a deuced hard time with that young man in Europe, and was in hopes I would be entirely relieved of him when I'd got him safe home, but now here you want me to go and tell you everything that every doctor in France thinks about him."

Bertha looked at him with her brown eyes full of contemptuous surprise; a scornful little smile curled her lip as she answered, "Your querulous impatience strikes me as being entirely uncalled for, Mr. Reynard. Excuse me for thinking I could expect any sympathy or aid from you. I had thought your connection with the family might have inspired you with a slight interest in my unfortunate cousin. I beg pardon for having bored you with so annoying a subject." She rose and moved toward the door.

"Stop, Miss Bertha, a moment, please." "Hang it," was his mental exclamation, "anything but seeing such visible scorn in those glorious brown eyes."

Bertha paused and turned toward him. She was utterly at a loss to understand his evident hesitation. Why should he be so reluctant to tell her what she wanted to know? Why had he started to tell her, and then checked himself so abruptly? Why did he stand there now, with doubt and perplexity united so plainly in his face?

Her wonderment found expression.

“Why should you hesitate to tell me what they said, Mr. Reynard? I cannot understand your strange hesitation. Are the conditions on which he can be restored such difficult ones to comply with that you will not raise hopes you know will come to naught? Ah, do tell me, please; tell me all, everything, for, oh! Mr. Reynard, I love my Cousin Ralph. I love him better than I do anything on earth; he was my only playmate in childhood, he is the only person living who feels for me anything kinder than cold endurance. If there is anything that human love and human exertions can accomplish to restore him to the old-time Ralph, tell me of it, in the name of mercy, and let me try to help him!”

It was not in James Reynard to listen unmoved to such an appeal, while a pair of soft brown eyes, dewy with unshed tears, were gazing right into his own.

He spoke hurriedly, and as if afraid of being overheard,—

“Keep strong drink from him, give him cheerful society, prevent any angering or annoying excitements, and he will recover. All the physicians agreed that it was but temporary. Will that do? I’ve nothing more to tell you.”

“Oh, thank you! thank you so much for the hope your last words give me!”

She held out a little white hand, which James Reynard clasped, and considered himself amply repaid for having risked John’s probable wrath. As they stood thus, Bertha, with grateful eyes fixed on the young man, and he gazing with evident admiration at her beautiful, animated face, they were both startled by a mocking voice from the doorway.

“Ah! excuse me. I had no idea I should be interrupting a *tête-à-tête* in the billiard-room.” Helen stood in the door, looking fresh and stylish in a bewitching Parisian costume, but her bright face wore a frown of jealous pique.

Bertha laughed lightly, "Oh, come in, pray; you are perfectly welcome to hear the subject of the *tête-à-tête* you have disturbed."

"For God's sake!" exclaimed Mr. Reynard, unguardedly.

Both the girls bestowed upon him a look of questioning surprise; then Miss Barrow, with an airy toss of her head, disappeared as suddenly as she had appeared.

"May I ask," said Bertha, very coldly, "why you desire to give an air of secrecy to this meeting of ours?"

He could not tell her that his whole future chance of happiness rested upon his brother's being kept in ignorance of his double dealing, for that would lead to some questions on her part which he would find it very difficult to answer satisfactorily, so he had to patch it up as best he might. He assumed an air of frank candor which was admirably well calculated to allay the tardily-aroused suspicions of an unsuspicious nature.

"I will tell you plainly, Miss Bertha, why I do not wish what has transpired between us to be known to the rest of the family. I have acted in direct opposition to Dr. Reynard's expressed wishes in telling you the opinion of the French physicians. He is a physician himself, of no mean order, and he entertains an entirely different opinion of your cousin's case, and of the treatment necessary for him. And not wishing to have hopes raised in Mrs. Reynard's bosom which he feels convinced will end in disappointment, he desired me to say as little as possible on the subject to any one. He says, truly, that suppressing the opinion of the French physicians cannot retard Ralph's recovery by one hour, whereas repeating it will only raise hopes that *cannot* be realized. You now understand my previous hesitation. Your evident distress led me to break a solemn promise given to my brother, and if the subject of this interview becomes known to him,

he will be seriously offended with me, and, although it may sound childish, John's anger is a thing I have never yet learned to brave without flinching."

The explanation was rather lame, but Bertha accepted it for truth, merely rewarding the young man's candor with a slight accession of the genuine contempt she had previously entertained for him.

"But Helen?" said Bertha, with an air of annoyance.

"Oh, I can make it all right with her," said Mr. Reynard, with an air of conceited complacency. "The little witch has just gone away in pouty jealousy."

"Jealousy!" repeated Bertha, opening her brown eyes to their fullest extent. "You don't suppose Helen could be so foolish as to fancy there was any possibility of a lover's *tête-à-tête* between you and me, do you? I have a better opinion than that of my cousin's judgment." And the quiet scorn in her voice was equal to half a dozen exclamation points.

James Reynard's air of conceited complacency merged itself rapidly into one of blank confusion, he felt himself growing visibly smaller, and continued to diminish in size, until Miss Lombard's sweeping train and flashing eyes were lost to view.

CHAPTER XXX.

A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER.

COMPOSED, as I have said, of such very incongruous elements, life at Aland was not of the very gayest. Helen missed the brilliant gayeties of her Aunt Verzenay's French chateau, and visited her ennui and spleen on the whole household, exclusive of her stepfather: to him she was always bright, pleasant, and winning, in return for which her lightest wish was

sacred in his eyes, and nothing left undone to render life on the plantation endurable to her.

They had returned from Europe early in the spring, and as Ralph's condition interfered with their usual summer migration, she had the whole season in which to torment herself and others before it would be "the thing" to pay a visit to New Orleans. Horseback riding, croquet, and flirting with Mr. Reynard and the few beaux the sparsely-settled neighborhood afforded, were her sole occupations.

The evenings at Aland were the pleasantest portion of the day, for they were enlivened by the most beautiful music, both instrumental and vocal, from Bertha, whose rare talents Miss Chevreul had cultivated in the most artistic manner. Bertha hoped by this gift to accomplish much for her Cousin Ralph. She remembered in the happy days gone by, how she and Ralph and Helen used to dance merrily to the old-fashioned tunes her dear mother would play so untiringly for them, on the little cracked piano, in the dingy old parlor at Tanglewood. She remembered how, when they stopped from very exhaustion, her mother would glide from the merry dance music into the sweetest of old ballads, while three little forms would cluster close around her, and listen in rapt silence until the beloved singer would stop, and giving three impartial kisses to three pure little mouths, she would send them all off to bed. She remembered each one's favorite. Helen's had been "The May Queen," her own, "Sleeping I Dreamed, Love," and Ralph's, "Logie o' Buchan," a simple selection from a simple répertoire, but very sweetly they had sounded then to the untutored ears of her cousins and herself.

She noticed, in her efforts to induce Ralph to talk, a strange disinclination to speak of his life abroad; he would tell her nothing of his travels, would tell her "he knew nothing about France or Paris," would grow pettish if she persisted in questioning him, but would always betray a certain degree of interest if she went

back to the old life before their separation. Would sometimes, in his worst moments, seem not to recognize in the beautiful young lady before him, the Cousin Bertha of his childish love, and would then talk to her constantly and tenderly of the dear little cousin to whom he was going back soon; "For you know," he would say, "I love little Bertha dearly, and when I come of age, she is to be my wife, and we are to live at the old plantation and be so happy, so happy. You've never seen my Cousin Bertha, have you, miss? She has eyes like yours, big brown eyes, soft and gentle, but she's a tiny little morsel, and you are tall and graceful."

Then the tears would come into Bertha's eyes to think that amid the wreck of all other memories her image had remained true and undimmed in her poor cousin's clouded mind. While all other loves had been wiped from off the tablets of his heart, affection for herself still maintained its hold upon him. This knowledge naturally made the shattered boy all the more dear to her.

She would often entice him to a seat near the piano of an evening, and play tune after tune,—sometimes gay, sometimes sad,—interspersing them with sweetly-sung ballads,—some new and others again old.

Ralph would always listen to her in motionless attention, but rarely rewarded her by any comment, or betrayed sufficient interest to ask for any more when she stopped. Sometimes he would seem to weary while she was in the middle of a tune, and, getting up from his seat, without a word of explanation or apology, would silently leave the room and go to his own apartments. And Bertha would quietly finish the piece, and then get up and close the instrument with a little sigh of disappointment.

She was often discouraged but never despaired, still persevering in the same plan.

It was about a month after the return of the heir of Aland that a little incident occurred which sent Bertha

to bed with a heart bounding with hope and set Dr. Reynard to scheming afresh.

The family were all collected in the large drawing-room. Mrs. Reynard dozing in her arm-chair, with the book she had essayed to read lying on its face on her lap; Dr. Reynard apparently deeply immersed in his newspaper; Helen and Mr. Reynard settling one of their daily quarrels in whispers in one of the window seats, and Bertha, as usual, at the piano, with Ralph near her in his large arm-chair, his nerveless hands folded loosely across his breast, his head resting against the back of the chair, and his dim, listless eyes fixed apparently on vacancy.

Bertha had been playing a succession of lively airs, without gaining one smile of approbation from the vacant face so near her. Finally she struck a few preparatory chords, and then began singing that sweetest of all sweet little Scotch airs, "Logie o' Buchan." At the close of the first stanza her cousin raised himself into a sitting posture, clasped his hands more firmly over his breast, and leaned forward in an attitude of eager attention. Motionless he remained until the last words were sung; then he exclaimed, in a voice of glad recognition, "Aunt Becky's song! my old favorite!"

With beating heart and beaming eyes Bertha turned swiftly towards him, crying, "Oh, Ralph dear, at last you know it! Oh, I am so glad, so glad!"

"Play it again!" eagerly cried Ralph.

Bertha turned to play it again, but the joy and agitation of her long-awaited-for reward made her voice unsteady, and the song ended in tears.

Dr. Reynard had been watching this little scene from the other end of the long room, and he noted the remarkable influence Bertha's music exercised over his stepson with anything but complacent feelings.

Ralph was certainly more nearly himself this evening than he had ever yet been since his return, and it was undoubtedly owing to the continued efforts his cousin made to keep him cheerfully entertained and

healthfully occupied. It had been Dr. Reynard's policy to allow this, so long as there were no visible results from it; but now Bertha's ministration had continued just long enough. A change of attendants must be appointed, and that forthwith.

All these thoughts traveled with lightning speed through John Reynard's scheming brain, and he had arrived at the above conclusion in the space of time between Ralph's request for a repetition of the song and Bertha's final break down.

He was watching the young couple furtively over the edge of his paper, and when Ralph sprang up at sight of Bertha's tears, and essayed to raise her bowed head from her supporting hands, he considered it ample time for him to interfere and prevent any more affectionate passages between the cousins. He arose and moved toward the piano. "Bertha, my dear," he began in that bland tone of voice which the young girl did so heartily dislike, "I am afraid you are agitating your cousin beyond his powers of endurance. Remember, we are to avoid all mental excitements for him, and although his mind is evidently strengthening, it is still far from sound. I think now you had better coax him to go to his own apartments."

The unfortunate boy winced at the word "coax," and, turning with a look of sullen hatred cast at his stepfather, he left the room without a word to any one.

"Oh, Dr. Reynard!" exclaimed Bertha, reproachfully, "how could you speak that way before him? You know nothing enrages him so quickly as to be spoken to as if he were a real lunatic. You know he is dimly conscious, poor boy, of his infirmity, but sensible enough to wince at any allusion to it; and yet you come here, just at the moment when I had so much reason to hope there was a decided change for the better, and undo everything I have done by talking right before his poor face of 'coaxing' him, as if he were a wild beast who had broken his chains. Ah!

how could you,—you a physician who ought to know so much better?"

"What is all this about?" exclaimed Mrs. Reynard, who had been aroused by the excited tones of Bertha's voice, rubbing her eyes and sitting up in her chair.

"It is Berthe," exclaimed Helen, maliciously, "taking papa to task for maltreatment of Ralph's case. She says he is trying to undo everything she has done."

"Is that true, Bertha?" asked Mrs. Reynard, in her very coldest tones.

"I leave that question for Helen to answer," said Bertha, sweeping gracefully and proudly from the room.

James Reynard's eyes followed her with eager admiration. "By George," was his mental exclamation, "what a Juno! The heiress of Aland would be worth sinning for if it was Bertha Lombard instead of this pug-nosed monkey!"

Helen caught the glance which followed her cousin's retreating form. Now, she did not care one fig for Mr. James Reynard, but he was an excellent subject to practice on, and she did not choose to have him sending glances after pretty Bertha Lombard every time she entered or quitted the room.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked, abruptly, just as he had mentally pronounced herself a pug-nosed monkey and Bertha a Juno.

"I was thinking," replied he, promptly, "what a little spitfire your cousin was!"

"You seem to admire spitfires?"

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed the young man, with affected horror in his little, twinkling eyes.

Then they returned to the subject they had been discussing before the little episode above described had occurred to interrupt them. Mr. Reynard was to leave for New Orleans soon. It having wisely occurred to his brother that too much familiarity with Mr. Reynard might *possibly* breed contempt, he had suggested that occasional and flying visits hereafter would be in better

taste and more apt to further their ultimate ends than domestication in the same house with Helen Barrow; so he was to leave very soon, and was striving earnestly on this night to win from the heiress of Aland some token of feeling a little warmer than friendship,—something decided which he might hold in *terrorem* over her in case she should prove fractious when he tried to bring her to the point. But she was proving fractious already, for she would not give him the very slightest foundation on which to build the very slightest of hopes. All she would grant him was a pouty admission that Aland was stupid enough with him there, but would be much worse with him away.

“Then you will be glad to see me when I come back?” said her suitor, eagerly.

“Of course I shall. I shall be delighted to see anything or anybody after I have been left alone for months with a crazy boy and a vixenish young lady.”

“They are not the only members of the house,” said Mr. Reynard, laughing at her heartless mention of her brother and cousin.

“No, but papa is forever busy, and I might as well talk to the refrigerator as to mamma.”

“And what about Miss Chevreul?”

“Hush! you make cold chills run down my back. I always feel as if I ought to talk to her about tombstones and epitaphs, and sacred-to-memories, if I want to entertain her.”

“By the way, what does she do here now? I should think your cousin’s education was complete by this time.”

“It is, but mamma has discovered that she is such a beautiful embroiderer, and, besides, is so anxious for me to have some one to whom I can talk French, so that I shall not lose my Parisian accent, that she won’t hear of her leaving, although the poor owl comes to her about once every month and tells her she wants to leave.”

“Helen,” said Mrs. Reynard at this moment, “it

is late. Mr. Reynard will excuse you for this evening."

Mrs. Reynard never lost sight of the proprieties. Helen was young yet, and she had no notion of having her throw herself away upon the first man who asked for her; moreover, she had, by no manner of means, made up her mind that Mr. Reynard would be the most desirable of sons-in-law. Surely, Helen, with her attractions and expectations, might look higher than a penniless young druggist, if that penniless young druggist was a very nice young man and a special pet of her own; but making a generally useful attendant of a young man, and accepting him for the husband of her only daughter, were two widely-different things. She had long since divined the direction Mr. Reynard's hopes and aspirations were taking. She was satisfied as to his feelings, but was not so certain regarding Helen's. Sometimes the girl treated him as if she really cared for him; at others, she snubbed him most mercilessly, but, of course, all that amounted to nothing. She was a freshly-emancipated school-girl, and was entitled to enjoy her freedom in any way that best suited her; and if breaking foolish young men's brittle hearts was any amusement, Helen should break them to her own heart's content. But a little flirtation was all she should suffer between them, until Helen had seen more of the world, and had a larger circle of suitors to choose from. She was to make her *début* the coming winter in New Orleans, and there was nothing so ruinous to a girl's prospects as to have the report of her engagement precede her as a sort of *avant-courier*, announcing to all would-be future suitors the hopelessness of their cases. Hence her parental oversight of the young lady's *tête-à-têtes* with her husband's brother, and hence that polite,—“Helen, it is late. Mr. Reynard will excuse you for this evening.”

Mr. Reynard rose and made his best bow to the two ladies as they sweetly bade him “good-night,” and glided gracefully out of his sight.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A CHANGE FOR THE WORSE.

THE following morning Ralph appeared in the breakfast-room, walking with a lighter step and wearing a brighter face than he had yet worn since his return. It was evident that the pleasant effects of his cousin's music had not yet worn away.

Poor boy! the insult from his stepfather, which had sent him from the room wearing a dark scowl of hatred, was entirely obliterated from the dimmed tablets of a memory unable to retain fresh impressions, while the sweet strains that had so delighted him in the childish days of yore had struck upon some deeply-hidden chord in the heart that was truer than memory; and it was vibrating yet, as a harp-string still quivers with melody when the hand that awaked it to life lies motionless in the lap of the player.

It was as if the dear dead had spoken to him, in old, familiar tones, through the mouth of the well-beloved quick, bidding him be of good cheer; and the benign message had sunk deep into the boy's darkened soul, soothing, for awhile, at least, its troubled depths.

Bertha noticed the decided improvement in him with beaming eyes, but made no comment; for, with that sweet womanly tact, of which she possessed so generous a share, she had never treated her cousin as if she were even aware that he was not as others were. She drew the happiest auguries from the continuance overnight of the good effects from her music, and glanced at her Aunt Reynard to see if the grateful joy in her own fond heart was not reflected in that lady's coldly handsome face.

Ralph had come up behind his mother as she sat at

the head of the table, and, placing his hands upon her shoulders, had stooped and imprinted a kiss upon her cheek, calling her "his handsome queen-mother" in a voice of animated admiration.

Mrs. Reynard smiled coldly at this unexpected display of affection from her son; and, as he passed on to his seat at the table, she remarked to her husband, in a voice which implied total deafness or complete unconsciousness on Ralph's part,—

"He seems much better this morning; he is almost himself," while she mentally rejoiced that the time was approaching nearer when she could pour out the vials of her long pent-up wrath upon the head of the son who had so disgraced and disappointed her, with some hope of being understood by him.

"What is she made of?" thought Bertha, as she witnessed her aunt's cool reception of her son's unusual demonstration. "She looks like a marble statue. I wonder if she really is one? I wonder if it isn't ice-water instead of blood that courses through her veins? Oh, how *could* she keep from putting her arms around his poor neck and bursting out crying right here, and thanking God for the improvement in her boy? I know I want to do it. I know mamma would have done it." Then Bertha remembered that she never had seen her aunt cry, and she did not believe she ever did thank God for anything.

Mrs. Reynard and Bertha were not the only two who had observed the decided change for the better in young Barrow. Dr. Reynard was keenly but furtively observant of his every word and action during the meal. A nerveless lassitude, settled melancholy, disinclination to converse, and almost total loss of memory had hitherto been the decided features of the young man's case.

It was evident that Bertha's cheerful society was arousing in him an interest in what was going on around him, and it was equally evident that her music

was penetrating the crust that had formed over his memory.

Two more months of Bertha's ministration and Ralph Barrow would be master of himself and of Aland.

In view of the imminence of this catastrophe, it behooved Dr. Reynard to act promptly. His plan of operations was matured before his unconscious victim had half finished his first cup of chocolate. For you know chocolate is hot and thought is quick.

It was Miss Lombard's practice, after her own particular duties for the morning had been discharged, to accompany her unfortunate cousin in one of those long walks which seemed to be the only pleasure he craved in his benumbed state.

A synopsis of those "particular duties" may serve to show that Becky's child was no pretty, useless loiterer on life's busy highway:

First of all she fed Blanche, "old Blanche" now, the pet of Ralph's earlier years (the dog whose fancied defection to the hated usurper had sent the poor little rebel rowing in hot haste across the lake to have his troubles tenderly pitied by sympathizing Bertha), and attended to her own caged pets, and watered the house-plants, which used to be Miss Chevreul's loving charge, and carried her aunt's orders for the day to the different members of the household cabinet, and—and then she did half a dozen other things which were too small to be mentioned or remembered, but which, nevertheless, added their mites to the general comfort of the household, and were so many units of usefulness added to those which went to make up the young girl's sum of life.

After all these duties were performed, she was ready for Ralph, and, arm in arm, the two would pass down the avenue of Chinese privet, which led to the gate opening on the lake-bank, along whose grass-grown shores they would trace their footsteps.

I know young ladies in novels generally time their

walks for the very early morning, when the poetically-inclined "Emmas" can gather "the rose that had lately been washed in the dew," and "convey" it to some equally poetically-inclined "Mary;" but my Emmas and Marys have never yet learned, or rather recovered, the lost art of walking in the early morning, without coming home in a sadly draggled state, which is suggestive of anything but roses washed in dew; and, as Miss Bertha Lombard was an exquisitely dainty mortal about her apparel, and held that cleanliness was next to godliness, nothing but the most urgent necessity could have induced her to start on a walk until the ground was sufficiently dry to insure her neatly-clad feet and immaculate skirts from danger.

Hence the regular hour for her walk with Ralph was after breakfast and after her regular morning cares were disposed of; so she need have no call to hurry home until Ralph chose to come himself.

It was a lovely June morning, this morning of which I am writing, and whether it was the loveliness of the morning, or else the fact that it was the last of such rambles that she and her cousin were destined to take together, that impressed every incident of that walk upon Bertha's memory, I know not. I only know that they were so impressed.

It was a bright June morning,—one of the brightest that divine love ever blessed a sinful and a fallen world with. Overhead was a sky of bluest blue, flecked with swiftly-scudding clouds of whitest white; and the blue and the white were faithfully reproduced in the glassy surface of the pretty little lake, save close along the bank, where the shadows of the tall trees lay cool and dark. A group of spotted cattle had waded into the water, disturbing its pure depths with their defiling hoofs, and stood there placidly enjoying the grateful coolness of the water, utterly unconscious that their own sleek bodies and great, calm eyes contributed no little to the charm of the prospect. But we never waste admiration on objects of beauty with

which we have been familiar from infancy, and Bertha and her cousin sauntered slowly along, sometimes talking, sometimes silent, without once coming sufficiently out of themselves to take note of nature's charming mood.

About a mile below the residence at Aland the lake narrowed into a mere bayou not more than a hundred yards wide. Across this narrow channel the lofty trees from either side flung their green shadows, making the water cool and dark from side to side. A little fishing-skiff lay moored to the gnarled root of a water-oak that branched out of the bank, and, espying it, Bertha gayly led the way down to it, Ralph following, as he followed her every beck. The two stepped into the skiff, and Bertha gently propelled it across the channel to the opposite bank.

"Come, cousin," she said, as she made the boat fast to a tree on the opposite side, "this is our old island that we used to play Robinson Crusoe on. Don't you remember the little house of twisted branches we wove together beneath an old oak-tree? and don't you remember how Helen and I kept house, and you used to go out and hunt for provisions?"

"Yes," said Ralph,—but it was a puzzled sort of "yes,"—more as if he were trying to recollect than as if he actually did so.

"Only," said Bertha, with a light little laugh, "in our island there was one Mr. Crusoe and two Misses Crusoe. And don't you remember, Ralphy, how we used to hunt mussels along the lake-bank, and make believe they were oysters?"

"Yes," said Ralph again, but still dubiously.

"And, oh! cousin, don't you remember what rejoicing there was in the little twig-house when you killed a squirrel and Blanche caught a rabbit and there were two birds found in our trap all in one day? and we used to wish so that the lake would get too rough for us to get back home, so we could spend the night in the woods? But it never did, you know, for dear

Uncle Otis used to come after us himself if the wind rose the least little bit."

"Uncle Otis," said Ralph, brightening,—“that was father,—poor father!”

But it was no portion of Bertha's loving plan that he should dwell on sad memories; so she hurried him up the bank and into the woods, saying,—

“Come on, Ralph; I think I can go right straight to the old tree now where our hut used to stand. Don't you remember how sorry and mad we were when we came over here one Saturday morning, and found that the cows had swum across, and had traveled right straight for our pretty twig-house, and had pulled it down and trampled all around the spot, and broken our mussel-shells, and trodden on the little box that Helen and I had left there, with two dolls in it; and Helen's doll's legs were broken off, and mine's nose was mashed flat? Oh, Ralphy, don't you remember?” And she looked at him anxiously and yearningly, for she did so long for some brighter answer than that monosyllabic “yes.”

They were walking slowly forward as she thus recalled reminiscence after reminiscence, until they came to a huge persimmon-tree that stood near the path they were following.

“And, oh! Ralph cousin, you must surely remember this persimmon-tree, for it is the very one that Blanche ‘treed’ little Jake in, and you thought it was a coon, and had just picked up a great chunk to throw at him, when he yelled out, ‘It's me, mars’ Ralphy,—it's Jake,—’t'aint no 'coon, leastways, 't'aint no four-legged one.’”

A hearty and familiar laugh from Ralph rewarded Bertha's efforts.

“Ah, you do remember!” she said, gladly.

“Remember? Yes, certainly I do,” said the young man, quickly, who always bitterly resented any hint to the effect that his memory was defective. “Why shouldn't I remember my own dog and Jake? Poor

old Jake!—he is dead now!—died of cholera. Now, then, that's perfectly correct, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Bertha, gently, fearful of displaying too much pleasure at this fresh instance of returning memory. "Now, then, cousin, there is the very oak our little hut was built up against, and that green mound there, where the dewberry is trailing its feathery white festoons, is all that remains of our Robinson Crusoe home. Oh, Ralph, Ralph, we were happy in those days! so happy, cousin, so happy!" And Bertha, the cheerer, the comforter, the strengthener, gave way to a fit of uncontrollable emotion.

"And what is the matter with us now, Bertha?" asked the young man, looking pained and puzzled. "Why are we not happy now, Bertha? Whose fault is it? Who has hurt you, who has angered you, sweet cousin? Am I not a man, and cannot I protect my dear little Bertha? Who is it, cousin? I can make you happy; I'm a man, Bertha, and, though I've been sick, I'm getting well now, getting well and strong; and, when I'm perfectly well, we are going to be married, little cousin. Come, don't cry, I'll marry you, you dear little girl!"

This was the longest and most connected speech Bertha had ever yet heard him attempt; and, although it was rambling and foolish, it served to feed her hopes.

"Cousin," she asked, drying her eyes and recovering her equanimity as suddenly as she had lost it, "you say you have been sick. Do you know what has been the matter with you?"

"No," replied her cousin; "I've been not quite right about my head. I've been sleepy-headed, and my brain has felt as if it was on fire; but, many and many a time when they've called me crazy to my face, I've known what they were saying and what they meant. I know they think me crazy, and I know they don't care. They wouldn't care if I died," he cried, bitterly. "You've been my only friend, little Bertha, and don't cry, darling, I'll marry you, hang me if I don't!"

"Ralph," said Bertha, coming close up to him, and laying her two little hands upon his shoulders, "look at me."

He looked straight into her glowing brown eyes with his dim, faded gray ones.

"Do you love me?"

"Dearly," said the poor boy, trying to place an arm around her waist; but she held him off and kept a steady hold of his eyes with her own.

"You say you want to marry me?"

"Yes, and I mean to do it. Who can prevent?"

"You must get very much better, Ralphy, before we can talk about such a thing; and now you must make me a promise before we go back to the house."

"Well."

"Will you do everything and anything I ask you, Ralph dear, for your own good, however unpleasant it may be?"

"Yes," was the ready response in words, though I doubt whether he fully comprehended the drift of her request.

"Remember," and her voice was tenderly apologetic for going into a plainer form of speech,—*"remember, if you want to do one thing, and I say, 'Ralph, please don't,' you promise not to do it; and remember, if you refuse to do something which I think is for your good, you will do it if I say, 'Ralph, please do it.'"*

"Yes, I promise," said the poor boy, with a kind air of condescension which was pathetically ludicrous.

"That is all I want at present," said Bertha, who did not want to tire him by making too great a demand on his weak mind at once.

Then they retraced their steps slowly and carelessly toward the little skiff, as if utterly indifferent as to when they should reach their destination.

They got into the boat, and this time they both sat on the same seat, each pulling with a single oar, and they laughed merrily when their elbows came in con-

tact and jostled the oar out of Ralph's weak grasp, so that Bertha had to scull back as before. Then she chained the little skiff to the gnarled trunk of the old oak as she had found it; but they were in no hurry to leave the green and shaded nook, so they sat there, dabbling their hands in the cool water like children, as they were, and Ralph reached after the great round flags of the manorca nut that were floating all around about them, and carpeted the floor of the little boat with them, and the water splashed gently up against the sides of the little craft as the motion of his body made it rock to and fro, and a huge, shining trout leapt high up from the water, its glittering coat of mail flashing in the bright sunlight, then dropped again into its watery bed; and a gaunt, awkward white crane, that was mincing along the water's edge, fishing for its dinner, stood meditatively on one leg looking at the spot where the glistening fish had disappeared, as if wishing, sorrowfully, that the trout had been a minnow or himself a cormorant.

Oh, foolish, foolish crane! why not take example of thy betters, and be satisfied in that sphere of life which it hath pleased God to call thee?

The peaceful calm of this quiet scene was contagious, for when, finally, Bertha suggested that it was almost noonday, Ralph looked up at her with a glance of loving tenderness as he said, in a voice nearly as soft as her own,—

“This has been a happy morning, darling cousin,—a very, very happy one. Let us come again, Bertha; I like this place.”

“To-morrow, Ralph dear, and just as often afterward as you wish.”

Then the strong girl sprang lightly on to the shore, and held out her hand to assist the feeble boy in landing. It was high noon when they reached the house, and, as was Ralph's custom, he passed straight on to his own apartments, where he generally rested after his walk for an hour or two, taking a nap or smoking,

after which he usually paid a visit to his mother in her own room.

His first move on entering his room was toward his cigar-box.

Side by side with it stood a bottle of absinthe, which the devil must have placed there during his absence.

As the ill-fated young man raised his eyes to his cigar-box, they rested upon the greenish liquor, which held such a baleful fascination for him. Like a madman, he seized upon it, and, drawing the cork with a wrench (for the devil had also accommodately acted as butler for him, and loosened the stopper of the bottle), he placed the poison to his lips and took a long draught from the bottle.

His dim eyes glowed with delight; his hands trembled with eagerness; he forgot his intention of smoking, and, seating himself in an arm-chair, he kept his poor, nerveless hands clasped tightly around the liquid hell-fire as if afraid his treasure might escape his hold. Thus he sat gloating over the bottle, every once in awhile imbibing a small quantity of the liquor, until the dinner-bell rang.

He entered the dining-room some few moments after the rest of the family were seated, for at the sound of the bell he had hunted around eagerly for a good hiding-place for his new-found treasure, and had stored it away as a miser stores his gold, walking all around the spot to see if it could be discovered from any possible point of view.

He seated himself boisterously at the table. His face was a fiery crimson, and his eyes glowed like balls of fires. His hair, which had not come in contact with the brush since he had made his toilet that morning, was in a sadly disheveled state, and stood up in crumpled confusion all over his head. He called for a glass of water in a loud and coarse voice, which attracted the attention of the whole table.

"Mamma," said Helen, pettishly, "do not you think Ralph is becoming more boorish every day? Cannot

you induce him to comb his hair before he comes to the table? Please look at him,—he really takes away one's appetite. I would quite as lieve sit down to the table with an Irish ditcher."

"Then, curse you, do it!" exclaimed the infuriated youth, who had been glaring at her across the table while she was making this speech; and, leaning forward, he sent the contents of his glass of water full into her face.

Every one started up aghast!

"Ralph!" exclaimed Mrs. Reynard, in tones of wrathful surprise, "leave the room, sir!"

But Dr. Reynard's voice, bland and unctuous, strove to pour oil upon the troubled waters.

"Agnes, my love, speak gently. Remember that your poor boy is entirely irresponsible for his words and actions. I doubt whether he even knows what he has done."

"I am crazy, am I?" exclaimed Ralph, foaming at the mouth with rage and excitement. And he started wildly to his feet, brandishing the carving-knife, which he had seized from the table. "I'm irresponsible, am I? I don't know what I am doing, don't I? Curse you! I know now,"—and he made a fierce thrust at his stepfather with the sharp-pointed knife in his hand,—"I know now that I am trying to cut the throat of the vilest reptile that crawls the earth! Curse you! I'm not so crazy as you think I am or hope to make me."

Mrs. Reynard and Helen fled shrieking from the apartment.

James Reynard and his brother advanced cautiously toward the maddened boy, who stepped backward step by step until he reached the wall, where he stood at bay, wildly brandishing his knife.

Of all the women of the household, Bertha Lombard alone remained. She *would* not fly and leave him.

Dr. Reynard kept the half-wild boy's fury at the

highest pitch by talking to him in the soothing style one uses to an escaped lunatic.

White and rigid, Bertha advanced toward him. For it cut her to the heart to hear him so addressed.

"Ralph," she said, in as calm a voice as she could command, "do you remember the promise you gave me this morning?"

But her cousin was too much blinded by passion and too much maddened by the fumes of the accursed liquor he had been imbibing since that promise had been given to heed her gentle voice.

Then she walked bravely up to him and seized the hand which held the knife with both her own.

"Traitor!" he exclaimed, with a wild oath, as he wrenched free the hand that held the knife and dealt her a blow across the arm. "You have joined with them against me!"

The blood spouted from the fair, white arm raised so beseechingly toward him; but the cry of pain that Bertha Lombard uttered was more from her wounded heart than from the cut upon her arm.

To think he should call her "traitress!" Ah, how it must hurt him to think she, too, had ranked herself with his enemies!

"Ralph dear!" she exclaimed, imploringly, "do not think that!—do not think it, dear! I am frightened for you, Ralph!—for you only, my beloved cousin! Throw down that cruel knife, Ralph! See! you've hurt me with it!—you've hurt me,—your cousin Bertha, Ralph, who loves you so dearly!"

She bared her white arm and held it out, all dripping with blood, for him to look upon.

With a moan of love and sorrow, he dropped the knife from his nerveless hand, and stooped to press his poor, quivering lips upon the wound.

As he stood thus, unarmed and unsuspecting, he was seized by two pair of cowardly, treacherous arms and borne struggling from the room.

"Traitor!" he shrieked again, as he struggled be-

tween his captors,—“traitress! ’twas a ruse! ’twas a ruse to give me over to them! Curse you and curse him! Curse the mother who bore me and the sister who taunts me! I curse them all, but above them all I curse you, beautiful serpent! beloved traitress!”

He was borne from Bertha’s presence struggling and helpless.

Sobbing wildly, the wretched girl fled to her own room, but, although she buried her head deep in the pillows, she could still hear those terrible words, “I curse you above them all, beautiful serpent! beloved traitress!”

CHAPTER XXXII.

A FAMILY COUNCIL.

MRS. REYNARD, her son, and Bertha Lombard were all missing from the breakfast-table on the morning succeeding the events related in the last chapter; Dr. Reynard and his brother, Helen, and Miss Chevreul forming the contracted and uncongenial circle that met round the daintily-spread board.

Dr. Reynard explained blandly that his stepson was still in such an excited state that it had been thought best to have a table set in his own apartments, and his mother was breakfasting there with him.

Helen, in return, accounted for Bertha’s absence by saying that she was suffering from a violent nervous headache, “brought on, I suppose,” she added, “by the fright Ralph gave her last night.”

“By George!” exclaimed Mr. James Reynard, in a burst of involuntary admiration, “she is a glorious woman! She walked straight up to her cousin last night, and seized his arm as fearlessly as if it had been

a bunch of roses, instead of a sharp-bladed knife he was brandishing so wildly."

"Quite heroic," replied John Reynard, noting the frown of dissatisfaction which was contracting his stepdaughter's brow, and giving his careless brother a quick glance of warning, "no doubt, but rather melodramatic. I think our pretty Bertha is rather given to effective hits and dramatic poses, etc. etc."

"I think," said Rosine Chevreul, who rarely ever spoke unless individually addressed, but finding courage to defend her slandered favorite, "that Bertha Lombard is the last person living who would do anything for effect only. She is rarely unaffected, and purely unselfish."

"Mr. Reynard, I believe you leave us to-day," said Miss Barrow, coolly ignoring Miss Chevreul's presence and turning toward the gentleman addressed.

"I am afraid I must tear myself away soon after breakfast," said the nice young man, with a languishingly sentimental look at the young heiress.

"So sorry," drawled Helen, playing idly with her coffee-spoon.

"If it is a matter of regret to you, what must it be to me?" was the gallant reply.

"Quite neat," replied Miss Barrow, "very pretty, indeed," in sarcastic allusion to his gallant retort. "I was about to say to you that, possibly, by the time you pay your next visit, my 'purely unselfish' cousin may have become convinced that the heir of Aland will never be in a condition to reward her tender devotion, in which case you may be able to win the 'glorious creature' yourself. I promise you my *very best* aid in the matter. *Au revoir.*" And, with an airy bow, she passed from the breakfast-room, humming an operatic air.

"I think you had better leave at once," said John Reynard, with a sneer.

"I think so, too," said James Reynard, with a frown.

And he did leave, without even being able to catch a glimpse of the young lady in whose eyes it was a heinous offense to express open admiration of any other female than Mademoiselle Hélène Barrow.

That day, at eleven o'clock, the whole white household at Aland, with the one exception of poor Ralph, met in Dr. Reynard's study in family consultation upon the best plan of treatment to adopt toward the afflicted young man.

Dr. Reynard had invited this consultation, and his opening address to the little assemblage was truly eloquent and affecting in the extreme.

Miss Chevreul had been requested to honor them with her presence, and had obeyed the summons, wondering why her presence should be considered at all necessary.

Miss Lombard had begged twice to be excused; but when Dr. Reynard sent her word that he desired her presence for her cousin's sake, she had come, looking white and sorrowful, with great dark circles around her eyes, for she had spent a sleepless and miserable night. A white bandage encircled the arm that Ralph in his mad fury had wounded.

Helen had the grace to utter some commonplaces expressive of regret concerning the occurrence.

"Oh, please don't speak of it!" said Bertha, the tears starting to her eyes; "you know he knew not what he was doing, and this little cut will hurt him far worse than it has ever hurt me when he comes to himself."

"Perhaps," said Helen, coldly.

At this moment Dr. Reynard gave a little preparatory cough, which was meant to claim the attention of the group for himself.

He was seated in a revolving office-chair, upon the arms of which his two elbows rested, and the tips of his ten fingers tapped each other gently as he prepared to give them the benefit of his scientific conclusions and sage advice.

"I have asked you four ladies to meet me here this

morning," he began, in a "fellow-citizens" sort of voice; "for, although, as the head of the family and the sole male representative of it, with the exception of my unfortunate stepson, I would be perfectly justifiable in acting as my own judgment dictates, I prefer leaving the decision of the matter in question to those who have a prior right to decide upon it.

"However painful to me, my dear," and the office-chair made a curve in Mrs. Reynard's direction, "to communicate such a fact to you, it is my duty to tell you plainly that from this time forward I fear we may look for the frequent repetition of such scenes as occurred yesterday at dinner. I have been watching Ralph very closely, and I may almost say I was anticipating just such an outbreak." (Possible.)

"Why, then, did he seem so much better, Uncle John, on the day and night preceding?" And Bertha fixed her great brown eyes eagerly on the physician's face.

The office-chair described a semicircle toward Bertha: "The very point, my dear Bertha, to which I was coming. It would prove tedious and unprofitable to you were I to go into scientific details. I have not asked you here to listen to a lecture on mental physiology, but to invite you to join with us in deciding what is best for the boy we all love so well, for your lovely devotion to him in his affliction, my dear Bertha, certainly entitles you to a voice in this council."

"Bertha *has* been most kind to my son," said Mrs. Reynard, in gentler tones than usual. And the young girl's eyes filled with tears at this unwonted tribute.

"I want you to tell us, my dear niece," said the lecturer in the office-chair, "exactly how your cousin acted during your walk yesterday, from the time you left the house until your return."

"You remember," said Bertha, "how much he seemed affected by the little old song I sang night before last. It was Cousin Ralph's favorite song when he was a little boy. Mamma used to sing for us all

three." She was unconsciously addressing Helen, instead of Dr. Reynard. "You remember, cousin, yours was the 'May Queen'?"

"I remember," said Helen, softly, for Aunt Becky had been dear to her little heart too.

"Yes, my dear," said Dr. Reynard, the least little bit impatiently, thus recalling Bertha to the subject in hand.

"Well, I think," continued the young girl, "that that little song aroused his memory more than anything we have tried yet, and I believe the good effects of it were lingering in his mind all day yesterday, for he took much more interest than usual in objects around him, and was so gentle and good." Then she told them how he had laughed so naturally when she recalled the incident of Blanche treeing Jake, and how he had enjoyed the fun of her awkward sculling across the bayou, and how he had carpeted the skiff with manorca flags, and how he had called it "a happy, happy morning," and begged her to come back there again because he liked that place.

"And oh, it was a happy, happy morning!" added poor Bertha, sobbing aloud, "and I thought it was just the first of many more to come, for I hoped it meant he was going to get well."

"Just as I thought," said Dr. Reynard, shaking his head gravely; "you acted for the best, my dear child, but you acted ignorantly."

"What do you mean?" asked Bertha, with pained surprise in her eyes.

"I mean, my dear Bertha, that the strain upon his very much weakened brain was too great and kept up too connectedly. Your sweet little song, my dear, evidently struck a chord within his memory, and the labor of thinking was recommenced in his shattered mind. If no other effort to arouse his memory had been made for several days, probably the effects of the music would have been highly beneficial; but, in your affectionate eagerness, you have undone your own

good work, my child. You recalled reminiscence after reminiscence, you yourself tell us, and the poor boy, seeing what pleasure any sign of recollection on his part gave you,—for people in his condition possess a wonderful cunning in reading faces,—strove to recall the events you alluded to, and overtasked his weak brain. Reaction had taken place in the form of the violent outbreak we all witnessed yesterday.”

I do not know how this explanation of Ralph's condition would have passed muster if, instead of four profoundly ignorant women, Dr. Reynard had been addressing four profoundly scientific men; I only know it sounded wonderfully plausible to them, and struck consternation into one tender heart in their midst.

“Then *I* did it!” exclaimed Bertha, horror-stricken.

“Unintentionally, my dear niece,” said the physician, soothingly,—“unintentionally, we all know, but nevertheless, I am afraid your injudicious ministrations are responsible for the poor boy's relapse.”

“Oh, Ralph, my poor cousin! you had good cause to call me traitress, for I have worked you a terrible harm, when I strove to help you.” And she leaned her head on the table, near which she was sitting, and shed bitter tears of regret for the mischief that she had not committed.

“What we are here for at present, however,” said Dr. Reynard, revolving from his niece to his wife, “is not to lament over the past, but to consult about the present and prepare for the future. I am afraid, my dear Agnes, that, for some time to come, Ralph may be in a condition that would warrant us in allowing him full liberty. It would probably be best for us to have a consultation held on his case.”

“No,” said Mrs. Reynard, quickly, “I do not care about exposing my trouble to the world. I have entire confidence in your ability to manage the case.”

“Thanks, my love.” And the self-made man acknowledged the compliment paid him with a courteous bow.

"You would not—a—you would not," said he, hesitatingly,—“you would dislike the idea of a—a private asylum, I suppose?”

"It is not to be thought of," said Mrs. Reynard, with a little shiver. It was her pride shivering, not her heart.

"Exactly," said Dr. Reynard. "I fully agree with you." And he spoke truth this time, for nothing was further from his intentions than letting Ralph Barrow out of his sight. "This, then, is my proposition, my love: it is the desire of the household that our dear boy should be kept with us, and his infirmities hidden from the world in the privacy of his own home, is it not?" He paused for an answer.

"That is my wish," said Mrs. Reynard.

"Ah, yes, yes," cried Bertha, "please don't send him away!"

"I am afraid of him," chimed in Helen, who had no notion of being carved up at any moment her brother should fall into one of his cannibal moods.

Bertha looked at her indignantly, and could not forbear saying,—

"You goaded him to that outburst."

"Papa says you are responsible for it," rejoined Helen, triumphantly, "and he knows best, I presume."

Bertha dropped her head sorrowfully at this cruel but unanswerable retort.

"I propose, then," repeated Dr. Reynard, "to appropriate the left wing of the house entirely to Ralph's use. I believe it consists of two bedrooms and the small room between the two, which used to be the school-room, does it not, my dear?"

"Miss Chevreul occupies one of the rooms in that wing," replied Mrs. Reynard.

Miss Chevreul seemed to think that this was as propitious a moment as any other for preferring a request she had to make; so she spoke without once raising her eyes from her lap, in a hurried, confused voice, nervously twirling an open letter through her fingers.

"Excuse me for interrupting you, Mrs. Reynard, but I need no longer occupy that apartment, as I have here a reply to one of the many letters I have been writing in answer to advertisements for teachers. My position here is a mere sinecure, and I do not feel justified in accepting so generous a salary from you merely for doing a little embroidery and keeping up Miss Hélène's music and French. So I think, madame, it would be better for me to go." She raised her sad brown eyes to Mrs. Reynard's face with an almost imploring look, and somehow the eyes traveled round to the man in the office-chair before they fell again to the floor.

"Of course, mademoiselle, you can do as you deem best," said Mrs. Reynard, very coldly; "but I think I am the best judge as to whether your services are worth what I pay for them, and I consider my daughter's French and music of so much importance that if you leave I shall have to replace you. You suit me in every respect; we have gotten used to your presence about the house, and, under existing circumstances, you can well imagine how extremely disagreeable it would be to me to have an entire stranger take your place."

"I wish you would try, my dear Agnes," said Dr. Reynard, "to prevail upon Miss Chevreul to relinquish her project of taking another situation, for she enters largely into my plan for Ralph's comfortable establishment in his own suite of apartments."

"I shall certainly endeavor to do so," said Mrs. Reynard, in reply.

"I was about to say," said Dr. Reynard, "that the other two rooms in the left wing might be fitted up for your son's use,—the end room for his bedroom, and the small one between him and Miss Chevreul for his sitting-room; and, for the present, my dear, in view of the unpleasant occurrence at the table yesterday, if you approve, I think it would be best for him to have his meals in that apartment."

"Alone!" exclaimed Bertha, pityingly.

"Certainly not, Bertha," said Mrs. Reynard, sharply. "Did he eat his breakfast alone this morning?"

"No, my dear love," said Dr. Reynard, flatteringly; "but I cannot give you up as a regular thing. The charm of our own meal-time would be broken if you were not there to grace the head of our table, and, instead of breakfasting, dining, and supping, we should merely feed. Occasionally only can we spare you to Ralph for meals."

"Who, then?" asked Mrs. Reynard.

Ah, how Bertha longed to hear this autocrat mention her own name!

"I was about to propose," continued Dr. Reynard, "that in consideration of the necessity for Ralph's private table, Miss Chevreul be requested to accept the position of his especial attendant and companion at meal-times."

Bertha's heart and countenance fell.

"We are told, you know, to avoid all excitement; and association with one so quiet and gentle as my old friend Miss Chevreul," and the office-chair creaked toward Rosine, "must inevitably have a most soothing effect."

"Do you consent, mademoiselle?" asked Mrs. Reynard, who had not one objection to raise to the proposed plan.

"Let me have time to think, please." And, rising hastily, Rosine Chevreul left the room abruptly.

"And may I do nothing for him?" asked Bertha, her voice and lip trembling piteously.

"Listen, my dear Bertha: I am sorry to say that your poor cousin is still in a state of insane exasperation against your unoffending self. I asked him this morning if he did not wish to take a walk with his Cousin Bertha, and he broke out into a fit of the most ungovernable rage at the mere mention of your name. Am I correct, my love?" turning to his wife for corroboration of his statement.

"Perfectly," said Mrs. Reynard.

"Poor cousin!" said Bertha, tenderly; "he knows not what he is saying."

"I think at present, my dear niece, that your presence would do him more harm than good; but rest assured so soon as we can win from him any expression of a desire on his part to see you, you shall be admitted to him."

"Thank you," said Bertha, dejectedly, for this was but sorry comfort to her loving heart; then she, too, begged permission to leave the council-chamber, as she was suffering still from her head. And she went sadly from the room, thinking of how she had promised Ralph, only yesterday, to take him back to the spot he had taken such a fancy to, and now she and he were as entirely separated as if seas were between them instead of only a few doors and walls.

While all that time Ralph Barrow was pacing up and down his own bedroom, with no one but faithful old Dora to keep him company, and with the key of the door turned upon them both, calling aloud for "Bertha, my dear Bertha!" Then, when no answering footsteps came to his call, he would cry, bitterly, as in the night before, "Traitor, traitor! beautiful serpent, cruel traitor!"

With Bertha's exit the family council was broken up; for although Dr. Reynard had proposed delivering a very neat peroration, there was no use delivering it for the sole benefit of his wife, who, of course, thought just as he did; nor for Helen, who was only interested in having Ralph removed from the table at which her own meals were eaten.

"You will speak to Miss Chevreul, my love, and try to prevail upon her to remain?—I know she will be tender and gentle with your poor boy."

"I shall certainly use my best efforts to induce her remain, as she is invaluable."

"Thanks, my love." And the council was closed.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LIFE AT ALAND.

MISS CHEVREUL was assisted to a decision upon the request preferred her in the library by two widely differing incidents. The first incident was finding the following note upon her mantelpiece on returning from her regulation walk.

Accident had given the master of Aland a hold upon her. Fate had thrown her into his pathway at the very moment when he was looking about him for a tool. He found a useful one in the weak, timid, sin-stained woman. But to his note:

“MADEMOISELLE CHEVREUL,—You are aware that I have requested my wife to use her influence in inducing you to remain at Aland as special attendant upon her son; but in case you persist in leaving us, I shall take great pleasure in writing you a *full* and *satisfactory* letter of recommendation to your future employers, as I know of *no* one so well able to bear testimony to your fitness as a guide for the young and pure. In case you should leave without such a letter from me, rest assured I shall not neglect your interests, but shall send one after you, let your destination be what it may. Hoping this may assist you to make up your mind more speedily,

“I remain your best friend,

“J. REYNARD.”

Rosine Chevreul read this note and grew white and sick. “A threat,” she murmured.

Bertha’s sweet voice, begging admission, broke up her most dismal train of thought. Hastily crumpling

the note she had been reading, into her pocket, she opened the door to the young girl.

Bertha brought her tear-stained face and pleading eyes straight up to the governess, saying,—

“Dear Miss Rosine, stay with my darling cousin, please. Oh, be good to him! They will not let me do anything for him, and Aunt Reynard is so cold, and Helen so heartless, they will freeze him between them. But I know you will be kind and gentle with him. I know you will try and win him to forgive poor me, for the treachery he thinks I have treated him with. Say ‘yes,’ dear Miss Chevreul,—say it for my sake, if you really love me as you say you do.”

“‘Yes,’ then, let it be, Bertha,” said the storm-tossed woman, in a voice of sullen acquiescence.

She had wanted to go away. Fate had proven too powerful for her.

So, when Mrs. Reynard came to her for her decision, she received “yes” for answer, and returned a coldly polite “thank you.”

Thus the heir of Aland was provided with a keeper,—a gentle, patient enough one, who was hardly likely to offend her unfortunate charge by any unnecessary display of harsh authority, and who was as little likely to benefit him in any way, if cheerful society was essential to that end.

Ralph Barrow was no raving maniac; he was simply melancholy mad. His stepfather knew full well the cause of that wild outbreak at the dinner-table, but it answered his own evil purposes to represent the young man as dangerous, and have him treated accordingly.

In installing Miss Chevreul in her new office, the physician had given minute directions, in his wife’s presence, as to the course to be pursued with her son.

“I think it best, my love,” he had remarked, “that all wine should be excluded from Ralph’s table, for some time to come at least.”

And Mrs. Reynard had cordially agreed with him.

“But as it might prove debilitating in the extreme,

if he were deprived of all stimulant so suddenly, I have prepared here, mademoiselle, a *tonic*, which you will please administer to him regularly before meals. It is an excellent appetizer." And he handed Rosine a glass bottle containing about a quart of greenish liquor, labeled simply "Tonic." "When that bottle is consumed, you will please notify me, so that I may prepare more."

Mrs. Reynard thanked her husband warmly for his kind thoughtfulness.

"Don't speak of it, my love,—don't speak of it as a kindness. When I married you I promised to be a father to your children, and with God's help I will be."

This, when with the devil's help he had just concocted a plan to keep Ralph Barrow in the half-imbecile state which so effectually prevented him from interfering with his stepfather's comfortable enjoyment of the dead man's shoes!

Rosine Chevreul held in her hand the *tonic* which was to strengthen John Reynard's position, and listened meekly to his directions for insuring his continuance in the same.

"You are to continue the daily walks which our dear Bertha so wisely instituted, but you will please confine your conversations during those walks to matters of general interest. Above all things, you will avoid any emotional excitement. If he touches upon personal subjects,—and he will be apt to do so, as Bertha has striven, in injudicious kindness, to lead him to talk of the friends and affections of his earlier days,—lead him gently from the subject and strive to win him to converse, instead, of his life abroad."

This to guard against the tide of memory being started afresh by childish reminiscence and tender stories of the auld lang syne.

"I prefer, for awhile at least, my love," to Mrs. Reynard, "that his evenings should be spent in his own room, with one or the other of us as companion. Only one at a time, however; for I think almost un-

broken quiet is the best panacea for his disturbed brain, and the conversation of two or three persons would prove too exciting."

Mrs. Reynard acquiesced in the wisdom of this measure also.

This exclusion of the doomed boy from the family circle in the drawing-room of evenings was a sure guarantee that Bertha Lombard's sweet voice and Logie o' Buchan's tender melody should create no more mischief.

"In the present weak condition of his brain, I consider music by far too exciting," continued the man of science.

"By far," was the wifely echo.

Having thus virtually imprisoned his stepson, and insured the administration of three glasses of absinthe daily, and given orders that all attempts at cheerful conversation, on his part, should be nipped in the bud, and securely excluded all the warmth, and brightness, and joy from the luckless boy's shadowed pathway, Dr. Reynard considered that he had performed his duty as a man and a Christian, and, figuratively speaking, mounted another round in his own estimation of himself, and on the ladder of fortune.

"Step by step, John Reynard,—you are almost at the top round," he murmured, mentally, as "he washed his hands in invisible soap, in imperceptible water."

Poor Bertha gave a little flicker of hope when she was informed that one of the autocrat's regulations was that one member of the family was to spend the evening with Ralph, in regular rotation, in his own sitting-room.

"It is to be taken in regular routine," explained the master of Aland, "so that we may all have the satisfaction of contributing our share toward the dear boy's entertainment."

"Papa is an angel!" exclaimed Helen Barrow, enthusiastically. "No own father could have contrived for Ralph with more tender consideration."

Bertha, to whom this remark was addressed, made no reply in words, but I rather fancy it occurred to her that such was not her conception of angels.

Bertha waited with eager impatience for her evening to come.

Dr. Reynard had waived his claim as senior in favor of Ralph's mother on the first evening; then he tenderly insisted that Helen should be the second to spend the evening in cheerful attempts to amuse her brother; the third was his own; and the fourth was awarded to Bertha, who waited for its coming with what impatience may be imagined, and made ready for her loving task with joyous eagerness.

There had been no outburst, no display, of violence on Ralph's part since that memorable day in the dining-room. He was docile and patient to a pitiful degree,—would sit for hours with his arms folded and his head drooped upon his breast, never speaking, unless spoken to; and when addressed, would turn his dim eyes upon one with such wistful sadness in the gaze that one's heart was filled with tenderest pity. The only moment at which there was ever any sign of life about him was when Miss Chevreul would approach him with his *tonic* mixed in a glass of water; then he became animal in his eagerness. He would seize the glass with both hands, drain it to the very last drop, and, handing back the glass, would beg for more in piteous earnestness and with a hungry, wild look in his eyes that irresistibly reminded one of a starving dog. At other times his quietness and dullness amounted to apathy.

Bertha's evening had come, and, with a lighter heart than she had known for weeks past, she made her way to the door of Ralph's prison. She paused with her hand upon the door-handle, startled by the sound of a loud and furious voice within. Its angry denunciation of something or some one was being deprecated in smooth, oily accents by another voice. Bertha softly opened the door and stood within the sitting-room.

Dr. Reynard was there alone with his stepson. He

paid Ralph a daily visit in a medical capacity, and I suppose had seen cause to remain.

As Miss Lombard made her appearance within the room, Dr. Reynard turned to his stepson, who was pacing the room in a state of fierce excitement, saying, in a soothing voice,—

“Ralph, my boy, here is Bertha,—pretty Cousin Bertha!—come to pay you a visit. Will you not welcome her?”

A glad smile broke over the poor, worn face, and Ralph turned eagerly in the direction in which his stepfather pointed; then his face changed, and dark hatred glowed in his eyes in place of the look of love that had come into them at the mention of the beloved name.

“That is not Bertha!—that is not my Bertha! My Bertha is tiny and smiling and sweet! That is not her!—send her away!—send her away! It is the beautiful serpent!—I hate her!—I hate her!” And quicker than thought he seized a goblet from the table near which he was standing, and hurled it at the woman who loved him so well as she stood there white and motionless.

“Leave the room!” exclaimed Dr. Reynard to the young girl, in a quick, imperious voice, which she obeyed involuntarily.

Sobbing as if her heart would break, her uncle-in-law found her half an hour later in his wife’s room, whither he repaired as soon as he had administered an anodyne and seen his stepson quieted after his paroxysm.

“Uncle John!” exclaimed the young girl, wiping away her tears and trying to steady her voice, “will you tell me why Cousin Ralph seems to know every one but me, and why my presence seems to excite him to those fearful rages?”

“Nothing in the world is more easily explained, my dear Bertha. The Bertha Lombard who is the object of such affectionate remembrance to our poor boy was a little girl, whom he himself describes as tiny and

smiling and sweet. His disordered mind will not allow him to form any new impressions, or enable him to correct errors in the old ones ; hence his inability to recognize in you—a tall, finely-developed young lady—the little Bertha of his childish love.”

“But he seemed to know me in those few days when he was so much better.”

“Partially, no doubt; but remember, my dear, the insane idea that took possession of him the other night with regard to you. He imagines you in some way responsible for his fancied delivery into the hands of his captors, as you will remember he called James and myself; and it is worse than useless, it is positively dangerous, to try and argue him out of any of his crazed fancies in his present condition.”

“Therefore, Bertha,” interposed Mrs. Reynard, “as much as we appreciate your affection for Ralph, and as hard as I know it will be for you, we must positively interdict all communication with him, for awhile at least.”

Bertha tearfully assented to the apparent necessity for this cruel exclusion of herself from attendance on her cousin. Thus John Reynard excluded from his stepson the one individual whose influence was at all likely to prove inimical to his own interests. Things were in neat trim now, and he could turn his attention comfortably to other matters.

Sadly and monotonously enough the almost stagnant current of life at Aland crept onward down the stream of time for the next few months. Bertha was too proud to wear her heart upon her sleeve for daws to peck at, so she buried her sadness from the view of others, and went her way calmly and quietly,—hoping much, fearing little, for youth is both hopeful and fearless. Rosine Chevreul was her comforter and her solace.

“I talk to him constantly of you, Bertha darling, and the memory of his little Cousin Bertha seems the one bright spot in his intellect; but he cannot yet re-

cognize you in the young lady I sometimes point out to him from our windows. 'That is not Bertha,' he will say; 'but you tell me she will come, and I will wait. Yes, I will wait for my darling.'"

Then Bertha would shed soft tears and kiss the governess and thank her for keeping her memory green and fresh in her cousin's shattered mind. Then Rosine would beg her nervously not to let her uncle know what she had told her, for she was acting against his direct orders in allowing Ralph to dwell upon the past. Then this strange prohibition set Bertha to wondering and pondering, and the more she wondered, and the more she pondered, the more confused became her conjectures, and the more decided became her dislike for Dr. John Reynard. What Bertha's brain-work eventually led to remains to be seen.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HELEN'S DÉBUT.

IF, during the process of reading the preceding thirty-three chapters, my readers have insensibly absorbed the idea that Dr. John Reynard was an inflated bundle of black deceit, conceited vanity, and iniquitous desires, let them read this thirty-fourth one in all charity, seeking earnestly for some indication of those angelic qualities, for the knowledge of whose existence we have, so far, been depending solely upon certain commendatory ejaculations emanating from his very partial stepdaughter.

It was he who first reminded his wife that it would soon be time for little Helen to make her début. It was he who generously pressed upon the same individual the duty of making that début a brilliant one,

regardless of trouble and expense. It was he who answered the unspoken reproach in Bertha Lombard's brown eyes, by talking so beautifully of the duties he owed his young stepdaughter, that her fresh young life must not be mildewed by the sorrowful gloom that Ralph's misconduct had brought upon her home. It was his duty to take her out into her native atmosphere of joy and warmth and brightness. He even gave proof of a most Christian-like spirit of forgiveness toward the young girl, who hardly concealed her dislike to him. He proposed that the two cousins should make their *début* together.

They were all sitting round the fire in the library when Helen's *début* was being discussed, Bertha alone making believe to work. She politely waited for her aunt to answer this suggestion. A cold

"Of course, Bertha can accompany us if she wishes. But I had never thought of her going, and have made no preparation," was all she said.

Dumb silence from Helen, who had no fancy for having herself put in the background by beautiful Bertha.

Then Becky's child spoke up for herself. First she gave a fierce little stab at the unoffending piece of muslin she was working on, which gave her courage to look straight into the bad, black eyes of her step-uncle.

"Thanks, Uncle John," she said, in her clear, brave voice; "you mean kindly, maybe, but nothing could induce me to join in festivities of any kind so long as my precious cousin is in his present unhappy condition. I shall remain at home with Miss Chevreul."

Then she got up and went away, leaving the fox, and the peafowl, and the butterfly a little abashed, and very much enraged at her bold words and defiant bearing.

"My love," said the fox, "your niece needs bringing down."

"Mamma," said the butterfly, "I think a box on the ear would make her treat us all with a little more respect."

"I shall reprimand her," said the peafowl, loftily.

And in due time Otis Barrow's little daughter flashed above the fashionable horizon, and it was not long before the learned Galileos and Herschels of the beau-monde, bringing their telescopic observations to bear upon the glittering stranger, pronounced her a star of the first magnitude, and Helen's success was an accomplished fact.

But as is the case in all matters worth discussing at all, a great diversity of opinion prevailed on the subject of her claims to belleship. So many were the opinions, and so great was the diversity, that, for the sake of brevity and convenience, I have reduced them to two generic opinions,—the opinion of her own sex and the widely differing opinion of the opposite sex, to which I shall subjoin—as a true and faithful biographer should—my own opinion, thus forming the three opinions to which the caption of this chapter refers.

"Do you think she is pretty?" asked timid Miss A (who was cautious, and never expressed an opinion until she had heard one) of Miss B, who was tall and slender,—a little too tall, and a trifle too slender.

"Pretty!" echoed Miss B, in a voice of amiable reluctance. "Well, dear, I do not like to be the first to express an unfavorable opinion; but, then, how can any one call a little, dumpy thing like that, a regular hop-o'-my-thumb girl, 'pretty'?"

"Do tell me what you think of that nose," said the strictly Roman Miss C, confidentially, to the rigidly aquiline Miss D, as the two stood close together in the crowded vestibule of a fashionable church, eyeing Miss Barrow savagely from beneath their respective veils.

"I suppose the men, dear, would call it piquant and slightly retroussé; I should pronounce it a most decided and most abominable pug."

"So should I," whispered Miss D, in an energetic undertone; "but, for heaven's sake, don't let any one know that I said so!"

"Of course not, my love."

"What do you think of her dressing?" asked Miss E of her bosom friend, Miss F. "Don't you think it is perfectly exquisite?"

"That may be your idea of 'exquisite;' but I assure you I think she has the poorest conception of the proper combination of colors of any girl I ever did see. Give *me* a million of dollars, and a chance to do my shopping in Paris, and I will show you the meaning of the word dress."

Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like Miss F, who strongly affected rainbow combinations.

"Do you know," said Miss G to Miss H, "that I think she has the boldest manners of any girl in her first season that I ever saw in my life?"

"For mercy's sake," rejoined Miss H, "do not say that where the men can hear it, for they will say you are dying of envy; for you know, dear, even I, your best friend, have to scold you constantly for your stupid bashfulness, but here, in my own room, I will tell you that I cordially agree with you. I think her 'graceful self-possession,' as brother John calls it, amounts to absolute brass."

"You must acknowledge now," said Miss I, who was the possessor of a pair of fine gray eyes that were beyond all rivalship, coaxingly to Miss J, "that her eyes are really fine; such a clear dark gray, and such long, silky lashes."

"I think those great, cold, staring eyes of hers are the ugliest things about her," snappishly retorted Miss J, looking daggers at her friend from a pair of small, china-blue orbs.

"What a mouth!" laughed pretty Miss K, opening a rosebud aperture to give utterance to her sentiments, in confidence, to her particular friend, Miss L.

"Hideous!" retorted Miss L, whose lips were thin and bluish; "her under lip looks as if it had been stung by a wasp, and swollen up in consequence."

"Do you know," cried Miss M, enviously, to Miss N, "that she wears a number thirteen shoe and number six glove?"

"Possibly," retorted Miss N, tapping the carpet with the toe of a number four; "any one could wear number thirteens and sixes if they chose to pinch the life out of their feet and hands."

"She *does* walk as if she was in mortal agony, doesn't she?" rejoined Miss M, immensely comforted.

"The gentlemen all say she is quite brilliant. Have you heard her converse yet, Miss O?" asked Miss P, who was a literary young lady, and wrote for the magazines.

"Well, I do not know that I can say I have heard her converse: I have heard her talk a good deal; but, in my opinion, there is a vast difference between the two."

"Oh, vast!" echoed Miss P, brightening.

"But the gentlemen seem to find her very entertaining, and that is all that is necessary, I suppose; though, for myself, I should prefer something a little more solid than flippant repartee or apt quotation."

"So should I, infinitely."

"I am told," said Miss Q, who was a serious young lady, and read the *Christian Advocate* in preference to *Godey* or *Demorest*, "that she is remarkably frivolous; has not one idea above dress."

"I imagine that what you have heard is correct," promptly responded Miss R, "for the few times I have seen her at church she has been dressed more like an actress than a Christian. The last time she was there she had on a Marie Louise blue silk, completely covered with black lace flounces, and I know the lace shawl she had on was one of the thousand-dollar ones, and her hat was a perfect mass of velvet, and lace, and feathers. You know she sits in the right-hand aisle, just five or six pews back of me, and I can see perfectly well everything she has on."

Miss Q heaved a sigh of pious condemnation of such frivolity, or secret envy of such gorgeousness, I dare not say which.

"They do say she treats that poor, afflicted brother

of hers outrageously," said Miss S to Miss T. "My cousin's brother-in-law came over in the vessel from Europe with them, and he says that this brother of hers is a poor idiot, who was born a natural, and they thought, possibly, they could take him over there and get him into an asylum before Miss Barrow was ready to make her début; but he begged his mother so pitifully to let him come home with her that she relented, and brought him back, and Miss Barrow was so enraged at the idea of his being allowed to come back and live at home that she treats him outrageously."

"You don't say so!" cried Miss T, greedily swallowing this fable for gospel. "She looks as if she were just capable of such conduct. I think she has the hardest face for so young a girl that I ever saw."

"Don't her diamonds nearly drive you wild?" asked honest Miss U, who was poor and handsome, of her friend, Miss V, who was rich and not handsome.

"If they are *real*," said Miss V, loftily. "They are certainly very magnificent; but they only serve to make her insignificance the more apparent."

"I wonder if her hair is all her own?" queried little Miss W, anxiously, of Miss X, whose coiffure was fearfully and wonderfully made.

"You little goose! of course not," retorted Miss X; "no one wears her own hair now."

"She has a beautiful form if she is little," said amiable Miss Y to unamiable Miss Z.

"Beautiful, no doubt; but one would really like to know how much of the credit for it belongs to nature and how much to the mantuamaker," replied the angular Miss Z, who had been given over in despair by the most accomplished mantuamaker in the city.

"Alas for the rarity
Of Christian charity!"

Let me hasten to rescue my poor Helen from total annihilation by recording the dicta of the other sex:

"Deuced fine girl; star of the first magnitude; diamond of the first water; pearl without price; pretty as a pink; dances like a fay; face piquant; worth going in for; charming little witch; first-class prize; sharp as a needle; manners of a little princess," are specimen expressions of the universally favorable comments which issued from the moustached portion of Helen's new world; but the moustaches, and the wearers, and the sentiments were so monotonously alike that it would be weary work to go through them all categorically. In short, she was all shadow and no light to the women; she was all light and no shadow to the men. My own opinion is the correct mean to these two extremes.

Helen Barrow was a naturally warm-hearted, lively girl, who had grown up first under the chilling influences of her mother's cold nature, and at an early age had been sent to acquire a veneering of selfishness and heartlessness at the hands of her Aunt Julia, which had been laid on lavishly and artistically, and called "polish." She had left school, as every girl does, her heart bounding with bright anticipations of the brilliant life she was to lead, and dreaming of the gay circle she was to gather around her at Aland.

Ralph's melancholy condition had been a great blow to her; for, in the first place, every girl feels a desire to look up to and lean upon an older brother, and this, of course, she could never do now; and, in the second place, when she learned that his misfortune was the result of his disgraceful excesses, she turned from him in disgust and loathing; for, remember, she had been educated into selfishness, and polished into a supreme distaste for anything that was in itself lacking in elegance and polish. That she could ameliorate her unhappy brother's condition, by devoting herself to his restoration, never once occurred to her, for her aunt and her stepfather had taught her to consider her own wishes and desires as paramount to all other considerations; and while ineffable pity for the shattered

mind and darkened soul of the young man filled Bertha Lombard's pure and unselfish soul, Helen only saw in him a marplot, who, so far from aiding her in her anticipated social triumphs, had interfered sadly with her plans, for it was an impossibility to have any festivities at Aland with her brother as he was; and, although she could leave home in search of her gayeties, she could not enjoy them comfortably for thinking of the family skeleton at home. No, she was the injured party. Ralph had come home incapacitated from all brotherly offices, and was a disgrace to himself and her; and this she resented. Resented by coldness and harshness, for she had been educated to be cold and harsh, but beneath the hard crust of selfishness which had formed upon the girl's impressible nature there was a heart and a wellspring of warm affection, which needed only the magic touch of love—pure and true—to force it into activity, and bid it wash away the veneering of selfishness and artificialness for which Madame Verzenay and circumstances were jointly responsible. In her secret heart she respected and admired her Cousin Bertha for her treatment of Ralph, and yet experienced a sensation of irritation against her, for she felt that Bertha was doing what she ought to be doing, and she believed that her cousin heartily despised her for selfish frivolity. This she resented.

Moreover, Bertha was so beautiful that it was extremely difficult for a merely tolerably pretty girl, who had been educated in a school of vanity and egotism, to do her bare justice. Bertha's beauty made Helen cross. She knew that her own personal charms were vastly inferior to her cousin's, and she had the good sense to perceive that the adventitious aid of her diamonds and her Parisian wardrobe would avail her nothing if Bertha Lombard, with her natural loveliness and exquisite manners, was brought into competition with them. Therefore, by the rules of the Verzenay code, as Bertha's light could not be extinguished, it must be hidden under a bushel measure. After she had secured

herself a desirable *parti*, she was fully resolved to "bring her cousin out," and see her well established in life.

In her filial relations she was like the majority of girls of her age and condition. Her mother had bestowed very little love and care on her in her lifetime. She had been properly clothed, properly fed, sent out of the way when her mother was in a bad humor, petted and laughed at when her mother was in a good humor, called a "perfectly outrageous child" when she had torn a new dress or spoiled a ribbon, furtively smiled at when she had gotten off a flippant witticism, or adroitly extricated herself from a scrape by a neat fib, and had grown up, in consequence, just what she was, —a girl with no very decided ideas on the subject of right and wrong, with an equal share of good impulses and bad, only, so far, circumstances had given occasion for more frequent display of the latter than the former. When you add to all this the lavish indulgence which her stepfather accorded her every whim, you will agree with me that it was matter of no very great surprise that Helen Barrow — young, wealthy, and petted — should be a little spoiled.

I am fully aware that I have limned you no very perfect picture, but then my subject was no very perfect mortal, —in fact, she was a sad little bundle of imperfections; she was just as I have drawn her, not very good, nor yet very bad. Well for you and me, reader, if others can say as much for us *behind our backs*.

CHAPTER XXXV.

COUNTERPLOTING.

BERTHA was up bright and early on the morning succeeding the departure of the Reynard party for New Orleans, and as soon as she was dressed she made her way to the dining-room in search of "Gus," the presiding genius of that apartment. She found him industriously spreading a little round table for *one*.

"Gus," said Miss Lombard, authoritatively, "you will lay a plate for me on my cousin's table as long as the family is absent. I do not intend taking my meals alone in this great barn of a room." And she gave a little shiver as she glanced over the long, chilly dining-room, in the middle of which her lonely little table was placed.

"Yes, missy," said Gus, with alacrity, demolishing the work of twenty minutes in the space of five, for Bertha Lombard was well beloved by all the dependents about the premises, and her orders were always obeyed with cheerful promptitude.

"Missy," said the boy, coming closer to the young girl, and nervously twisting the cup-towel hanging over his arm into a tight coil, "I'se got a 'fession to make to you."

"A *what*, Gus?" asked Miss Lombard, smiling, but puzzled.

"What you call that, missy, when folks done did somethin' wrong an' then goes an' tells on theyselves widouten bein' made to?" asked poor Gus, in sad perplexity.

"Oh," said Bertha, enlightened by this explanation of his meaning, "you mean a *con*-fession, Gus."

"Well, den, missy, I'se got a *corn*-fession to make to you," resumed Gus, energetically and imitatively emphasizing his newly-acquired syllable.

"Well, Gus, let me hear it." And Bertha settled herself in an arm-chair by the fire, prepared to listen patiently, and judge leniently, for Gus's character for prolixity and probity were so equally well established that she felt confident beforehand that the "somethin' wrong" he was about to confess, and which it would take him such a long time to confess in the chosen phraseology of his race, would, in the end, turn out to be the veriest peccadillo.

"Well, Miss Berthy, ma'am, you mus' know, in de fus' place, dat I is ben very far from well for some time pas', ma'am."

"I am sorry to hear it, Gus," was the sympathetic reply from the young lady in the arm-chair. "What has been the matter?"

"Well, a little of mos' ev'rything, missy. I'se had a tech of the rheumatics, an' a swimmin' in de head like, an' a sort o' innard fever."

"Inward fever, Gus!" ejaculated Bertha; "why, what on earth can that be?"

"A fever, missy, wot de patien' hisself is aware of, but nobody kin tell it from de feelin' of his skin," sententiously replied this victim of many ailments.

"Ah!" said Bertha, informed and amused. "Well, Gus, do you want me to 'doctor' you in Uncle John's absence? Is that what you are coming to?"

"No, missy," said Gus, very solemnly, "my *corn*-fession is what I'se coming to."

"Very well; go on." And Bertha assumed her judicial aspect.

"You knows, Miss Berthy, that I sets Mars' Ralphy's table arter I done sot the big un', 'cause Hiram's a giddy young thing what 'ud as soon set po' little master down widout any fork as wid one, and 'ud never know wedder de salt was on de table or not. An' then you knows, arter I done superintendin' like,

as you may say, de settin' of master's table,—for you know, missy, he is de master, however things may look at present——”

“Yes,” said Bertha, quickly; “go on, Gus.”

“Well, Miss Berthy, ma'am, as I was sayin', I sets Mars' Ralphy's table, and in de sideboard wat sets in his dinin'-room Miss Rosie she keeps de bottle ov tonic which de doctor he ordered for po' little master.”

“Yes, Gus,” and Bertha began to betray a little more interest; “what of that?”

“Well, Miss Berthy, my back was a hurtin' of me powerful bad de other mornin'; an' wen I was gittin' the sugar out ov de sideboard to put on de table,—for I never 'lows that pilferin' Hiram to handle de keys to de said sideboard,—I jis took a little pull at Mars' Ralphy's medicine, thinkin' it might help my back, you know, missy.”

“Oh, Gus, who was pilfering then?” asked Bertha, with a little reproving nod of her pretty head.

“Stealin', missy,—stealin' medicine? Dat would be a funny notion. I knowed ef little master was hisself, an' I was to go an' ax him for de coat off his back, he'd give it to me, for ole master thought a heap ov dis nigger Gus, missy, sho's you born.”

“I know he did, Gus, and dear cousin would, too, if he knew you for what you are. Go on, and let me hear about the tonic which you didn't pilfer.” And Bertha looked very demure.

“Yes, Miss Berthy,” said Gus, “I'll 'low that it was pilferin', but maybe good may come ov it yet, missy, for de Lord works in mos' mysterious ways, my little mistiss.”

Bertha was extremely puzzled to know how Gus was going to prove that he had been divinely directed to her cousin's sideboard.

“Well, missy, right or wrong, I tole you as how I tuk a pull at Mars' Ralphy's tonic bottle for my back's sake.”

"Well."

"Well, Miss Berthy, all I'se got to say is dat number six is blue-john by de side ov that 'ar stuff."

Gus's "blue-john" was the skimmed milk of the dairy, let me explain, and not the fluor-spar of the miners.

"Why, ef ole Nick had'er brewed it, and sot his wife to bile it in de fiery furnace, it could'n' be no hotter, missy," continued the old man, growing very earnest in voice and manner.

"Well," was still all that Bertha, alert and interested, took time to interpolate.

"An' I want to know, missy, how is any humin stomich gwine to stan' wat would eat de staves out'er a wooden barrel in no time?"

"But Dr. Reynard prescribed it, Gus."

"Yes, missy," was the negro's laconic answer; but his face clouded over, and his voice was sullenly respectful.

"How did it make you feel, Gus? Did it help your back?" asked Bertha, innocently.

"Miss Berthy, does you remember one mornin' last week dat I was so stupid an' sleepy-like, waitin' roun' de table, dat mistiss got mad an' tole me to git out de room an' send Hiram in dar, and mars' doctor, he say, as I left de door, 'De ole fool is bin drinkin' whisky, I smells it in his breath'?"

"Yes, I remember it," said Bertha, "perfectly."

"Well, missy, 'fore God, all I had teched that mornin' was one big pull at Mars' Ralphy's medicine bottle."

Bertha Lombard sat bolt upright in her chair now; her eyes had lost the laughing look they had worn when Gus first began his confession, and were flashing with the fires of indignation and determination. Her hands were tightly locked together, and her lips were rigidly compressed.

"How did it taste?" was her next inquiry.

"Like bottled hell-fire!" was the negro's prompt reply.

"Gus," said the young girl, turning her clear, piercing eyes full upon him, as he stood respectfully before her, "you have not told me all this merely to confess your own pilfering; you have had some motive in it, I know. That motive may be a good or bad one; it rests with your own conscience to tell you which, but you must not say another word. And let me advise you not to say to any one else as much as you have said to me, for your own sake. Of course you are perfectly safe with me, but you must keep your own discoveries and your own suspicions to yourself. Now go."

"Have I made my little missy angry?" asked the old man, penitently.

"No, Gus, for I believe you spoke out of love for Cousin Ralph, and I could not, therefore, be angry with you." And Bertha Lombard's voice took on a gentler tone. "But remember, you have said enough."

Gus left the room without replying to this, leaving Bertha in undisturbed possession of the long dining-room, the length of which she paced backward and forward in the excitement of the suspicions aroused by the negro's confession.

Exciting drinks were to be kept from him, James Reynard had told her, and yet here was a drink being administered to him three times a day, by order of his stepfather, which had proved most powerfully exciting to the brain of an able-bodied man. He was to have cheerful society, was another express order of the European physicians, yet here was he given over to the constant companionship of a woman whose own deeply-seated gloom was calculated to depress the liveliest of mortals rather than cheer the melancholy.

"God forgive me, if I do him a cruel injustice!" was Bertha's mental exclamation; "but he *forces* me to think that he has some design in plotting against the poor boy's recovery, and if he has, what *can* that design be but to keep him out of his fortune? And if he has," she repeated, almost audibly, "then, weak girl as I am, I will outwit him, if human ingenuity can

accomplish it. Ralph, my poor Ralph, for your dear sake I will have to sully my lips with falsehoods. I will have to meet cunning with cunning. It will have to be plot and counterplot, and all unaided, for I have not a friend with whom I can even take counsel. I have not a soul upon whose assistance I can rely. I cannot take a slave for my ally,—one who might possibly spoil all, even in the moment of anticipated success, by cowardly fears ; so God help me, if I am about to do right, and forgive me, if I am wrong.”

Bertha's was a strong, self-reliant nature, given more to prompt action than to pensive brooding. In the quarter of an hour she thus spent, restlessly pacing up and down the deserted dining-room, she had decided on the first step to be taken in the effort to counteract the injuries she firmly believed was being done her cousin.

The plot, jestingly referred to a chapter or two back, had been a mere determination on her part to join Ralph in his daily walks, to resume her musical experiments upon him, and to strive again to arouse his memory in the absence of his stepfather, for she had never been satisfied that Ralph's condition had at all improved since their cessation ; and, although she had never dared say so, she was secretly presumptuous enough to doubt the wisdom of the course laid down by Dr. Reynard, and had long ago resolved that as soon as the opportunity occurred, she would resume the course which had promised such flattering success.

“I will be more careful this time,” she thought, “if I really was to blame before, and only exercise his memory a very little at a time.”

Now, although she would not let Gus place his suspicions in words, she believed that he, too, thought the course pursued was resulting in evil instead of good ; and she determined if loving activity and unsleeping vigilance could render harmless the hurtful influences that were bearing upon her cousin in his helpless condition, they should not be lacking.

Her plans concocted, she proceeded to action. The first step she took was to hunt up an empty decanter, with which she left the dining-room, and proceeded rapidly to the little room—once the school-room, now the dining-room—of Miss Chevreul and Ralph.

Gus was there laying the table for three, as Bertha had ordered. Everything was silent in the two adjoining rooms, for both their occupants were habitually late risers.

“Gus,” said Miss Lombard, carelessly, holding the empty decanter by her side, where it was hidden in the folds of her dress, “I want you to go and ask Richard if he knows how to make those crumpets Cousin Ralph used to be so fond of, and if he says ‘No,’ step over to Aunt Dora’s room, and ask her if she feels well enough to make some for our breakfast.”

“Yes, missy,” said Gus, in a cheerful voice, anxious to show his beloved young mistress that he had gotten over the smart inflicted by her equivocal reception of his confession, and he left the room briskly.

The keys were dangling in the door of the sideboard, toward which Bertha eagerly hastened, her pure, sweet face dyed crimson as she thus inaugurated what she felt must be a long course of such secret manœuvring and watchful cunning that it bore the semblance of guilt.

The *tonic* was there, a fresh bottleful of the greenish-white liquor.

Setting her empty decanter on the floor, Bertha poured fully two-thirds the contents of the *tonic* into it, then she filled the *tonic* bottle with water from the pitcher on the sideboard, stopped it up, and set it in its original place, after which she hastily left the room with her decanter full of *tonic*; this she safely deposited in a locked closet, in her own room, and then flew back to the dining-room, where Gus presently found her, engaged in the housewifery employment of placing the teacups in the warmer before the fire.

“Well, what did he say?” she asked, looking up at

the waiter, with a very red face. She had purposely sent word to Richard to prepare a dish which she knew he was utterly ignorant of, so that Gus would have to travel to the farthest extremity of the yard, where Aunt Dora's cabin was located.

"Aunt Dora's gwine to make 'em, missy," said Gus, quietly resuming his interrupted occupation.

When Ralph finally entered the breakfast-room, listless and quiet, as usual, Bertha was sitting by the fireplace, looking demurely at home, her little fingers busily employed on a piece of crochet, her feet crossed upon the low brass fender as if they belonged just there and nowhere else, outwardly very calm, but conscious of a wildly-beating heart.

"Good-morning, cousin." And she looked up at the young man with a brave, bright smile, while her voice and her heart were full of tears. But Bertha had assumed the rôle of actress, and she never did things by halves.

"Good-morning, miss," said Ralph, with the stately politeness he always accorded the "beautiful lady."

Bertha placed a chair for him opposite her own, he took it and sat patiently and quietly in it for a very few moments, then he began to show signs of restlessness, and cast impatient looks around him, as if he wanted something or somebody.

"Miss Chevreul is late this morning," said Bertha, soothingly, "and you want your tonic."

"Yes, yes!" he exclaimed, eagerly; "bring it."

Tremblingly, Bertha arose to bring it. Suppose her ruse should fail, and he should fly into one of those fearful rages when the diluted tonic should be given him? Ignorant of the art of mixing the absinthe, which had been duly imparted to Miss Chevreul by Dr. Reynard on giving the tonic into her hands, she poured out half a tumbler of the contents and handed it to her cousin.

He tasted it, smelt it, and handed it back with a dissatisfied air. "What is it? What is the matter with it?"

"Maybe I have not fixed it right," said Bertha. "Come, here is breakfast on the table; let us eat breakfast first and take the tonic afterward."

Ralph glanced at the breakfast-table, then seizing the glass from Bertha's hand, drained its almost tasteless contents to the bottom. Contrary to Bertha's frightened anticipations, he did not rage and rave, he only looked sullenly discontented. As Bertha replaced the glass upon the sideboard, Miss Chevreul entered the room from her own apartment.

"Why, Bertha! what does this mean?" she asked, looking uneasily around at the evident signs of usurpation on the young girl's part.

"It means, dear Miss Chevreul," said Bertha, sweetly, but at the same time with a little rebellious air of determination about her, "that I am not going to eat my meals like a prisoner in solitary confinement, and I hardly think you could be so cruel as to wish me to."

"Certainly not, my dear; but you know——" And the Frenchwoman paused in painful hesitation.

"I suppose you mean," said Bertha, finishing her sentence for her, "that Uncle Reynard would object if he were here. Maybe he would, but you know, dear Miss Rosine, that I am a terrible outlaw, so you cannot be held responsible for anything I do after you have entered your protest. Well, you have entered your protest now, you have shown me plainly that you highly disapprove of my presence here, and by thus seating myself at the table, I prove that I am going to eat my meals with you and Cousin Ralph, in spite of all the protests, gentle Rosine, you can enter; so do sit down before our nice crumpets are quite cold." And with a bright smile the pretty rebel seated herself. There was nothing left for it but submission on Miss Chevreul's part. A nervous, abortive attempt at a smile quivered around her thin lips as she took her accustomed seat at the head of the table and proceeded to fill the coffee-cups.

The meals in Ralph's dining-room were generally partaken of in almost complete silence. Miss Chevreul would occasionally ask some commonplace questions, which he would answer or leave unanswered as chanced to suit him. On this morning, Bertha kept up a lively, rattling monologue, touching lightly and pleasantly on a variety of subjects; but her only reward was seeing the sad-faced governess brighten under the genial influence of her presence. Ralph followed her with his eyes, listening to her sweet voice with evident pleasure, but never once seeming to grasp the meaning of anything she was saying. The meal concluded, Bertha turned to Miss Chevreul with a pleading face, and said to her,—

"I want to join your walk this morning, mademoiselle; do not be so cruel as to forbid me."

"Bertha," cried Miss Chevreul, in an agony of perplexity, "let me tell you how I am situated. Dr. Reynard has left his stepson in my charge, with minute directions as to the course I am to pursue toward him, and with every confidence that I will do as he desired me. Yet here, on the very first morning, you are tempting me to disobey his orders; and you know how hard it is for me to refuse you anything, for, oh, Bertha, my darling! I do love you very, very dearly!"

Bertha thanked her whilom teacher sweetly for this unexpected tribute, and then asked her gravely what express orders her uncle had left behind him.

"He told me," said Rosine, who hoped, by a literal repetition of the autocrat's commands, to insure obedience to them, "that *no one* but myself was to accompany his stepson in his walks."

"Can you imagine any reason for that command?" asked Bertha.

"I suppose," replied Rosine, "it was to insure the perfect quiet he seems to think so necessary for Mr. Barrow."

"Possibly," said Bertha, in a doubting voice. "Now,

mademoiselle, let me tell you what I think. I know it is great presumption to dare entertain an opinion conflicting with Dr. Reynard's, but my opinion is the result of close observation. My cousin was undeniably better at the time of that unhappy excitement, and I consider that it was due to the cheerful course I pursued with him. He has had intense, suffocating quiet ever since he has been in your charge, and instead of improving he is worse than when he came home. I resolved some time ago that, if the opportunity was ever afforded me, I would try once more to restore Ralph's mind by leading him gently over the well-remembered paths of the past. God has sent me that opportunity, and I do not intend to lose it for fear of Dr. Reynard's wrath. I may do good, I cannot do harm. And now, while we are on the subject, I may as well tell you exactly how I intend to proceed. I intend, in the first place, to restore this room to as complete a semblance of its old self as I can; I intend to bring before him constantly reminders of the childish past, to which his poor, clouded intellect so continually reverts. I intend to resume the music which affected him so powerfully and so beneficially; so far as I am able to accomplish it he shall be carried backward over the stream of the past to the time when he and I were two happy little children; and, even if he then fails to find the lost links of memory's chain, or, finding them, lacks the power to connect them with the present, we will both have been the happier for our stolen pleasure. I tell you honestly, this is what I intend doing. It is not in your power to prevent me, but you have it in your power to go right into the library and sit down and write every word of the treason I have just spoken to Dr. Reynard, and tell him that you are powerless to prevent me from carrying my seditious plans into execution."

"Bertha, Bertha, how you run on! You know I would not treat you so."

"So you see, dear Miss Chevreul, you cannot help

yourself. You are not disobeying Uncle Reynard's orders, but I am defying them; and I shall be the first one to tell him how conscientiously you strove to obey him, let the consequences of my insubordination be what they may."

Rosine Chevreul looked with undisguised admiration at the animated face of the flashing creature before her, who so proudly and defiantly pursued the course her own pure conscience dictated, and hungrily longed for the power to do likewise.

So brave Bertha triumphantly carried her second point that morning, and formed the walking-party into a trio.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MAN'S EXTREMITY—GOD'S OPPORTUNITY.

"BERTHA," said Mademoiselle Chevreul, at the close of the first day of the young girl's rebellious proceedings, "do you know that you are doing a very bold thing in thus inaugurating an entirely new routine for your cousin?"

The two ladies were sitting over the drawing-room fire after Ralph had retired to his own room. Bertha's little feet were crossed upon the low brass fender, one elbow resting upon her lap supported her head, and her large brown eyes were fixed thoughtfully upon the glowing logs. She was busy planning to-morrow's campaign.

"Yes, ma'am," she replied, as demurely as in the days of yore when Miss Chevreul had charged her seriously with some childish delinquency.

"A very bold thing, indeed, Bertha, for you, a young and ignorant girl, are presuming to set your own opinion, as to the best course to be pursued with your cousin,

against the opinion of his stepfather, a man of experience and a physician."

"Miss Rosine," said the young girl, "I wish to ask you a few questions, which I hope you will answer very honestly. Do you think my Cousin Ralph's condition at present, both mental and physical, is better or worse than it was when he first came home?"

"Well, child, it certainly seems to us—but then, you know, we are so ignorant—that he is not so well."

"If we are ignorant," said Bertha, spiritedly, "I presume we can tell when a person is dull or bright, cheerful or gloomy, if we are not men of experience and physicians to boot."

"Yes, certainly, my dear; but——"

"But," said Miss Lombard, "you stand so much in awe of Dr. Reynard, in common with the rest of the family, that because he says a thing it seems to be all right. Now, my dear Miss Rosine, I cannot say through which of my ancestors, whether paternal or maternal, it has been handed down to me, but I have a terribly rebellious vein in me that impels me to do my own thinking, and pass my own judgment, in spite of everything and everybody. And as I know of no reason for thinking Dr. Reynard's judgment infallible, I am audacious enough to fancy him mistaken in the present case. I conceive that I have a duty to perform toward my cousin, and I intend to perform it to the very best of my ability. It is unfortunate for me that my proceedings have to be underhand and unauthorized, but the stubborn willfulness of others is alone responsible for my having to proceed in a clandestine manner. On the other hand, you have a duty to perform towards your employers. You conceive that excluding me from my cousin's society is necessary to the conscientious performance of that duty, and I can see that by taking matters so boldly into my own hands, I have caused you great pain and perplexity. Now, dear Miss Rosine, as I do not wish you to be considered in any way responsible for my insubordination, I

am going to propose a compromise. In the first place," she continued, "we all take it for granted—do we not?—that it is the universal desire of the family that my cousin should be restored to his right mind."

"Why, of course, Bertha, who could desire the contrary?"

"Of course, who could?" replied Bertha, dryly. "Well, then, all I ask is an opportunity to *prove* whether my mode of treatment or Dr. Reynard's is most likely to conduce to that happy end. I have never yet had my own way fully with my poor cousin, and this prolonged absence of the authorities that interfered is my one chance; but if, at the end of three weeks, there is not an improvement perceptible even to yourself, I will discontinue my innovating proceedings and let you have your own, or rather Dr. Reynard's, way. But if you really love me, as you have so often professed to do, you surely will not be so cruel as to oppose me until you see some harmful results from my boldness?"

Thus appealed to, Rosine found it impossible to interfere with the devoted girl.

"It is for his good," she argued, "and if it really turns out that she has benefited him, his stepfather will forgive my disobedience of his orders; and she has promised, poor child, to discontinue her efforts if I pronounce them injurious by the end of three weeks. Surely *no one* will blame me for letting the poor, dear girl have a little happiness."

"It is for his good," argued Bertha; "and although mamma and papa begged me always to be truthful and honest, I'm sure they will forgive me the deceit with which I am compelled to act. If it does good, all his real friends will rejoice, and his enemies will deserve their discomfiture; if it does harm, I can so easily drop my ministrations."

The grand error into which Dr. Reynard had fallen was in over-estimating Rosine Chevreul's devotion to his interests, through fear of himself, and under-esti-

mating the daring self-reliance of Bertha Lombard's character. He had had fears that she might bring her blandishments to bear upon her cousin again ; but it had never once occurred to him that she would so daringly subvert all established authority.

Moreover, his principal dependence was on the tonic, which was having such a highly beneficial effect, an ample supply of which he had left with Miss Chevreul ; and how could he know that Bertha's lawless fingers would tamper with that too ? So, although he should much have preferred taking the young lady with them, he had seen her remain behind without any very serious apprehension.

As regards Bertha's exceedingly bold step in reference to the tonic, all the difficulties and perplexities of her proposed plan of operations centered on that bottle. She was earnestly anxious to discover whether the fiery liquid was really harming Ralph or not. But at this point her own sad ignorance balked her. She had cunningly managed, during the one day in which she had been experimenting, to substitute for the weak dilution, which he so scornfully rejected, a wine sangaree, which had stilled his cravings at each call for his stimulant, and sent him to bed finally in a state of drowsy calm. But that was only one day, and how was she to get through with the next, and the next, and the next ? for she had both her cousin and Miss Chevreul to deceive here, as she felt sure that in the matter of the tonic Rosine would continue firm, and she would have no good reason for combating that firmness. Chance had favored her on the first day. She had coaxed the poor boy into swallowing the first glassful before his attendant had made her appearance in the morning ; she had coaxed Miss Chevreul into lying down in the middle of the day, for the relief of a really bad headache, and had then administered her claret sangaree, and when Rosine arose from her seat, languidly, about sundown, to give the third dose, she was briskly informed that *it* had just been administered.

"But that was only one day," said poor Bertha to herself; "how on earth am I to manage to keep it away from him long enough to see whether Gus is right or wrong in thinking it is injuring him?"

Even while these perplexing thoughts were tormenting Bertha, and knitting her pretty brows into a perfect pucker, she and Miss Chevreul were both startled by a loud rap at the front door. It was still early, and Gus, whose last duty, before leaving the house, was to see his young master comfortably settled for the night, heard the peremptory demand for admittance, and hastened to the front door.

It had been a wet, drizzly, disagreeable day,—the inauguration day of a very wet and cold winter; and, after the door had been opened, the two ladies in the drawing-room heard a terrible stamping and scraping upon the door-mat, and a perfectly strange man's voice holding converse with Gus, in loud, brisk tones.

"Family not at home, you say, eh? but, my good boy, you will have to give me shelter yourself then, for my carriage has broken down over your bottomless roads, and it is as dark as Egypt, and neither myself nor my driver know anything about the neighborhood."

Gus stood still holding the door in his hand in terrible uncertainty, for although so well used to the open-hearted generosity of the country in which he had been born and reared, as not to have hesitated a moment about ushering the wet and shivering stranger into the drawing-room fire, if the master had been at home, he was sorely troubled how to act when two lonely women and a helpless boy constituted the whole garrison.

"How I know he won' steal my silver spoons to-night?" asked Gus of himself, as he stood there eyeing the generous proportions of the traveler, thinking how easy it would be for him to do anything he chose. But just as the stranger was opening his mouth to enter a protest against such halting hospitality, the drawing-

room door opened, and Bertha Lombard stood there, framed in the doorway, with the glowing warmth of the drawing-room for a background.

"Ah," said the gentleman, stepping forward, as if pleased to find some one more civilized than Gus to treat with. "Excuse my intrusion, young lady, but I have just met with a mishap which will prevent my proceeding farther to-night, and I must beg shelter from you, which is something I am afraid our sable friend here is inclined to refuse me."

"Oh, Gus!" said Bertha, with a little reproachful smile.

"You see, missy," said the boy, respectfully but apologetically, "as Mars' John and miss was bof' gone, I thought as how you mout'n like to have no visitors,—dat was what was de matter; I hope de strange gentleman will 'scuse me." And, closing the front door, Gus locked it for the night, while Bertha ushered the stranger into the warm, bright drawing-room.

After having greeted Miss Chevreul with a stately, somewhat old-fashioned bow, the gentleman seated himself close to the bright fire, where, drawing off his gloves and unbuttoning his overcoat, he proceeded to make himself comfortable.

Bertha discovered, by the glare of the lamp, that her guest was by no means a young man. For he had a great bald place on top of his head, and the hair that fringed it round was a grizzly gray, as were his thick and bushy whiskers; a pair of keenly intelligent blue eyes peered out from beneath his shaggy brows, taking minute and accurate note of everything that came in their way. His mouth was large, and full of firm white teeth, and wore a smile of kindly benevolence that irresistibly preposessed one in his favor. After he had made himself thoroughly comfortable, he drew from his right-hand pocket a card, which he handed to Bertha, with a good-natured smile, as he said,—

"I want you to satisfy yourself, my dear young lady, as to the respectability of the stranger you have taken in so unquestioningly."

The card bore the name of "Dr. Charles Gardiner."

"Oh, I hope," said Bertha, quickly, "that you will excuse our poor Gus for his overzeal, and believe me that you are very, very welcome."

"I admire him for it, my dear,—I admire it in him," said the strange doctor, briskly. Then he went into a detailed and amusing account of his accident, and then he informed the young ladies of his destination, the plantation of a friend, who lived in an adjoining inland parish, and passed from subject to subject in the most easy and self-possessed fashion. But all the time he was talking, Bertha was thinking, thinking of the God-sent opportunity to get advice, disinterested advice, as to her cousin's case, from a man whose whole bearing and style of conversation betokened mind and cultivation.

Long before she had politely handed him a bedroom-candle and indicated to him that Gus would show him his apartment, she had resolved to be up very early in the morning and try to have an interview with this Dr. Gardiner.

After the stranger had left the room, Miss Chevreul leaned over and picked up the card which Miss Lombard had thrown on a table near at hand.

"Dr. Gardiner!" she exclaimed, in a voice of recognition.

"You know him, then?" said Bertha, eagerly.

"Not personally," replied the governess. "I only know of him as one of the most eminent members of the medical faculty in our city."

"Oh, I am so glad!" exclaimed Bertha, unguardedly.

"Glad!" echoed Miss Chevreul. "Why?"

"Nothing," said deceitful Bertha, demurely, "only it is a satisfaction to know one is extending hospitality to a gentleman and not a rowdy."

And then they bade each other good-night and went their separate ways.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

DISINTERESTED ADVICE.

I MUST be up very, very early, thought Bertha, as she gave a final "snuggle" to obtain a perfectly comfortable position under the blankets, for these learned men, and eminent physicians, and sanitary theorists are fearfully early risers. I often wonder why they take the trouble to go to bed at all, and if they ever do sleep, anyhow, which was the last wonder that puzzled the brain of our young conspirator that night, for she was very soon sleeping as sweetly and soundly as an infant.

So deep an impression did her resolution to rise very, very early make upon her mind, that she was fully awake at early dawn.

As soon as her fire was made, she was up, and, making a very rapid toilet, she proceeded to the small apartment adjoining the family dining-room, which was used as the morning sitting-room.

Before leaving her chamber, however, she had gone to the locked closet, where was stored away the decanter of tonic so fraudulently obtained, and, taking it with her to the sitting-room, she placed it and a wine-glass on the mantel-piece; having done which, and stirred up the fire, and blown a little speck of dust off the mantel-shelf, she seated herself to wait with impatient patience for the appearance of the strange physician.

He came in very soon, looking the impersonation of vigorous health and cheerful benevolence. Cordial morning greetings were exchanged between the young hostess and her guest, whose keen blue eyes were scanning her sweet young face and fresh morning attire with pleasure and admiration.

Bertha expressed a polite hope that he had spent a comfortable night.

"Most comfortable, thank you," replied the stranger; "and now, my dear young lady, may I inquire if you make a regular practice of rising this early every morning?"

"Ah," said Bertha, with a bright smile, "you think you have found a *rara avis* to describe in your next sanitary lecture,—a young lady fond of early rising. But truth compels me to acknowledge, Dr. Gardiner, that I am up earlier than usual this morning with a motive." And Bertha looked frankly up into the benevolent face of the stranger, as he towered above her, standing with his back to the fire, playing with his watch-guard.

"A still greater phenomenon!" said Dr. Gardiner. "A young lady with a motive!"

"And pray, doctor, do not the young ladies where you came from have motives?"

"Not often, my dear,—not often; at least none powerful enough to get them out of bed before sunrise."

"Ah, you are speaking of city women, who have no other way of disposing of daylight but by sleeping it away."

"I am not speaking of *women* at all," said the man of science, dryly. "I am speaking of doll-babies and butterflies."

"Then your sarcasms are totally unmerited," said Bertha, saucily; "for doll-babies have no call to get up at all, and who ever caught a butterfly in bed after sunrise?"

"Defend your sex, defend your sex!" said the physician, laughingly. "I never saw a woman yet that appreciated a compliment paid herself at the expense of her sex."

"But, Dr. Gardiner," said Bertha, "to return; my motive in rising so early is connected with yourself."

"With me, young lady? Why, then, bless my soul, child, state it! state it!"

"Doctor," said the young girl, fixing an earnest, steadfast gaze upon his kindly smiling face, "you have a good, kind face, and if faces are really good indices to hearts yours must be a truly benevolent one."

"Oho!" replied the doctor, good-humoredly, "your motive, then, in rising before the sun was to turn an old man's head with a pretty compliment, was it?"

"No," said the young girl, so seriously that her guest became correspondingly grave. "But I am about to do something so peculiar, that I wanted to satisfy myself beforehand that you would be good and help me, instead of pooh-poohing me down for a crack-brained girl, as some people would do in your place."

"As for 'pooh-poohing you down,' my dear, I cannot answer for that beforehand, for my duty as a man and physician may imperatively demand such a proceeding," replied Dr. Gardiner, jestingly; "but I am very sure that you are not a crack-brained girl, and am prepared to give you my most sage advice and counsel sweet."

He had seated himself now, and his eyes were fixed upon the face of the young girl opposite him with an expression of interest and kind encouragement.

Bertha rose suddenly, and, reaching down the decanter and wineglass she had placed in readiness, she extended them toward the physician, saying, abruptly,—

"Dr. Gardiner, what is this?"

Dr. Gardiner glanced at the decanter, and then at the young girl, in unmitigated surprise; then he smelt at the contents of it, then he poured a small quantity into the wineglass Bertha held out for him, and, having taken a slight taste, he replied, promptly,—

"It is absinthe, miss."

"What is absinthe, doctor?" asked ignorant Bertha.

"Well, my dear young lady," began the stranger, growing slightly sententious, as the best of men will when playing Solomon for the benefit of a young and

beautiful woman, "absinthe is a wine of the most pernicious character. It has been very appropriately styled by some one, 'the opium of the West.' It derives its name from one of the various plants which are made use of in its composition, absinthe simply meaning wormwood, the botanical *artemisia absinthium*. Other plants, such as flag-root, angelica-root, the leaves of the dittany, and a few others, of highly exciting qualities, are macerated, and placed in high-proof alcohol; but, I presume, you are not particularly interested in the *modus operandi*; you only wished to know what absinthe was, I believe."

"How does it affect people, doctor?" asked the young girl, who seemed deeply interested in his description of the liquor.

"Its immediate effects are delightfully stimulating, which, in fact, is the cause of its baleful popularity," replied the physician.

"What is absinthe good for, Dr. Gardiner?" was Bertha's next inquiry, in a carefully careless voice.

"Its friends would tell you, my dear, that it was most excellent as an appetizer. Its enemies, among whom I am most proud to rank myself, would tell you that it is excellent to produce insanity, to blunt the memory, and eventually cause death; it is, in short, the best brutalizer known."

"Are you *certain*, Dr. Gardiner, that that is absinthe in that bottle?" asked Bertha, in whose large eyes a strange light gleamed, while in either cheek a bright red spot burned, a sure sign with her of great internal agitation.

"As certain as I am that there is a very skeptical young lady standing before me, who dares question, both with her tongue and a pair of big bright eyes, the wisdom of years and experience." And, with a good-humored smile, the stranger handed the decanter and glass back to her.

In silence Bertha replaced them upon the mantelshelf; then she turned again to the stranger with another question,—

"Insanity and loss of memory, you say, are some of its effects?"

"If the use of it is persevered in long enough such will inevitably be the results," said the man of science, positively.

"Then, doctor, if you had a patient who was suffering from no apparent ailment but intense depression of spirits, was, in fact, almost melancholy mad, would you recommend absinthe for a tonic for him?"

"Not unless I wished to kill him by slow poison," was the answer, which came promptly and decidedly.

Bertha gave an involuntary start. The red on her cheeks burned redder, and her eyes actually scintillated with suppressed wrath and indignation; but she remained perfectly silent for a few moments, then once more she turned to her guest, saying,—

"Dr. Gardiner, I know what I am going to say will seem very, very strange to you; but please don't think of the peculiarity of my conduct, only look upon me as an ignorant girl, who is in a sore strait, and who comes to you for counsel and advice, because the world does not hold one human being to whom she can turn in this the hour of her great extremity."

Touched by her earnestness, Dr. Gardiner replied, very gravely,—

"I have already promised you, my dear young lady, to assist you to the very best of my ability, and I beg you to confide in me as freely as you would in a father. God helping me, you shall never have cause to regret your confidence."

"Ah!" said Bertha, with humid eyes, "my dear father was a physician, too, and if he had lived I need not now have been appealing to a perfect stranger for advice."

"Then," said the stranger, "it becomes my duty, as well as my pleasure, to assist you all in my power, my dear young lady. You have claims on me, as the child of a brother physician, so pray speak out without any hesitation."

Thus encouraged, Bertha did speak out bravely and fearlessly,—

“I think God sent you here to me, Dr. Gardiner. Your extremity was his opportunity. Your broken carriage will be mended by the time you have eaten your breakfast, and you will get into it and go away, and will, in all probability, never see this place or me again; but before you go you will have it in your power to do great and incalculable good to a fellow-creature. You will see at the breakfast-table, this morning, a young man whom I beg you to notice very closely. He is my cousin, and I love him very dearly. If the wisdom you say you have acquired by years and experience be really worth anything, oh, bring it to bear upon my poor cousin! You will have but a slight opportunity for observation; but I wish you to tell me, from what you can see, whether his sad case appears a hopeless one, and tell me what I can do to save him.”

Then hurriedly and graphically she sketched for him a picture of Ralph Barrow as he was before he went away, and his present contrasting condition, with its various fluctuations. She carefully avoided mentioning his stepfather's name, or her own suspicions, for if she could work Ralph's salvation without implicating the character of her aunt's husband, of course she would prefer doing so.

In the long course of his practice as a city physician, Dr. Gardiner had become so familiarized with sorrow and mystery, in every shape, that the young girl's words did not seem half so thrillingly mystifying in his ears as they did in her own, poor child! all unused as she was to sin in any form, or to dark and guilty secrets.

He had formed his own theory relative to the darkly-hinted-at case of the young man he was to see long before his loving advocate had half-way done describing his pitiful condition.

“Some handsome scamp,” was the physician's men-

tal decision, "who has drunk himself into a brute, and this pretty thing, who loves him as women will love handsome scamps, is trying to make a man of him again;" from which you will see that Bertha's dark mystery had not inspired the man of the world with a grain of awe or horrified anticipation.

Miss Chevreul's consternation and Gus's open-mouthed astonishment reached their acme when Bertha gave authoritative orders for the breakfast-table to be set for four, and set in the family breakfast-room. "We will all breakfast together," she said, in conclusion.

"Mars' Ralphy, too, missy?" asked Gus, making exclamation points with his eyebrows, as if doubtful of having understood his orders correctly.

"I believe you heard me say lay *four* plates!" said Miss Lombard, who could be very lofty when occasion called for loftiness.

"Yes, missy," said Gus, respectfully. Then he hurried out to inform Richard, the cook, with a chuckle, "that if mars' doctor didn't watch out, missy'd show him yit!" which may sound somewhat cabalistical to you, reader, but was perfectly clear to Richard, who replied that

"Miss Berthy was jis' like her grandma Snowe, anyhow,—all sperit and spunk, an' had more sense in two ov her leetle fingers than ary three men he'd ever seen yit."

When breakfast was announced, Bertha went to her cousin's sitting-room, and, slipping her arm through his, she led him toward the large dining-room.

"Cousin," she said, as they went along, "we have a strange gentleman to breakfast with us this morning, and I want you to do the honors of your own table."

"Yes," said Ralph, with a smile of childish pleasure. "Who is he?"

"A stranger, whose carriage broke down last night, and he came here to beg shelter."

By this time they were in the dining-room, and

Bertha introduced the unfortunate heir of Aland with great *empressement* to their visitor.

Dr. Gardiner shook hands with him cordially, speaking to him in a loud, brisk tone of voice, which compelled his attention, and addressing to him just such remarks as he would to a man in full possession of all his faculties. After they were seated at the table, the physician began asking him a variety of questions relative to the topography of the neighborhood, the names of the different places, their owners, etc.; then he rambled on to a general discussion of horses and dogs, winding up by expressing his admiration for a fine gray horse he had noticed in the stable-yard that morning.

Bertha was filled with astonishment and delight at the aptness of her cousin's replies, and the evident interest he took in every word the physician said. Sometimes his answers would be very slow coming, he evidently pausing to take in fully what had been said to him, but the information he gave was perfectly accurate.

One thing in Dr. Gardiner's manners toward her cousin particularly struck the young girl. He totally ignored the presumption that he was an incapable,—treated him and talked to him just as he would have done if he had been the soundest man in the world. "Ah," thought Bertha, "I was right, then, when I used to beg them not to treat him like an escaped lunatic!"

At the close of the meal Bertha led the way back into the sitting-room without asking Ralph to accompany them, for she was wildly eager to hear an expression of Dr. Gardiner's opinion. Miss Chevreul retired as usual to her own room.

"Well," said Bertha, quickly, "what do you think of him, doctor? Is his case hopeless?"

"My opportunity for observation has been so slight, my dear young lady, that it would be hazardous for me to pass a decided opinion on your cousin's case; but I honestly see no reason to doubt his ultimate re-

covery if the right course be pursued. I infer, from the strictly sensible answers he returned to my questions, that his mental faculties are rather benumbed than destroyed."

"Then he is not mad?"

"At present he certainly is not; but, unless properly treated, he will undoubtedly become so. He needs to be aroused."

"How is it to be done?"

"I should suggest cheerful, but not exciting, amusements. Merry companions of his own age and sex."

"Would music hurt him, Dr. Gardiner?" interrupted Miss Lombard, eagerly.

"On the contrary, if he used to like it, I should unhesitatingly recommend it."

The bright eyes of Bertha sparkled with triumph.

"The music I can supply, but the cheerful companions of his own age and sex are utterly unprocurable," she said.

Dr. Gardiner had been drawing on his gloves preparatory to taking his leave as he spoke, and now he stood before the fire evidently plunged in deep thought.

"Miss Lombard," he said, finally, "I have carefully abstained from asking you any questions, but one or two I must ask if I am to do your cousin any good."

"Certainly, doctor; what are they?"

"Who are the young man's legal guardians?"

"His mother and his stepfather."

"Who is his stepfather?"

"Dr. Reynard, sir," said Bertha, wondering what that had to do with Ralph's case.

"Reynard?" said Dr. Gardiner, knitting his brows curiously. "John Reynard?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is he—was he originally from New Orleans?"

"Yes, sir; I think he was."

"Humph!" muttered Dr. Gardiner, in an audible

undertone, "as d——" His proposed sentence died of a cough.

"Sir?"

"Nothing, my dear," for he could not tell her he had anathematized Dr. John Reynard as a some-sort-of-a scoundrelly puppy, who could not look an honest man in the face, so he merely said "nothing." Presently he spoke again:

"I was about to say, before you told me who the young man's guardian was, that if you would present him my card on his return, with my compliments, and ask him to send his stepson on a visit to my house for a month or two, I would guarantee that my three boys should have him himself again in less than three months; but——"

"But what?" asked Bertha, eagerly, as he paused.

Dr. Gardiner eyed her keenly for a moment without replying.

"But what?" repeated the young girl, impatiently.

"You look like a girl who held her own opinions, Miss Lombard. What is your opinion of your cousin's stepfather? Do not be afraid to answer truthfully."

"I do not like him, sir," said the young girl, frankly and truthfully.

"Neither do I," replied the physician, bluntly.

"You know him, then?"

"Yes, I know him," was the dryly significant reply; "and what is much more to the point, he does not like me; so you see no invitation from me would be favorably received."

"Dr. Gardiner, my cousin is of age," said Bertha, significantly; "he has a perfect right to visit where and whom he pleases."

"So he has, so he has," said the physician, amused at the feminine quickness which had settled the difficulty over which he had stumbled. "Well, then, my dear, play your sweetest music to your cousin; keep that decanter from him, and as soon as he is able to leave home give him this card, on which he will find

my address, and tell him that he will always find my doors open to him and a hearty welcome awaiting him."

A fervent "thank you," was all Bertha could find expression for.

"Ah!" she murmured, "I have entertained an angel unawares." And she looked up into his face with brimming eyes.

"A fallen one, my dear,—a fallen one. God bless you, and good-by." And with a hearty hand-shake Bertha's powerful ally took his departure.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

REBELLIOUS PROCEEDINGS.

JOHN REYNARD sneered at love, laughed it to scorn, spat upon it, condemned it as the weakness of fools and of women; and it was a retribution most meet and just that his deep-laid plans were doomed to utter frustration through love's potent agency. Bertha Lombard's love for her unfortunate cousin made her powerful in cunning and resistless in determination. The unhappy young man's unconscious love for the "beautiful lady" made him docilely tractable in her hands alone, thereby assisting her every effort.

Rosine Chevreul's passionate adoration for the bright, brave girl, who was all she herself most ardently longed to be, rendered her useless as a tool for Bertha's antagonist, and converted her into an unconscious ally. Her perfect love for Bertha was casting out her fear of John Reynard. She reconciled her own conduct easily to her conscience.

Dr. Reynard's regimen was believed by Bertha to

be faulty,—she only asked an opportunity to prove it. In three weeks much harm could not be done. At the end of that time Bertha had promised to let the old order of things be resumed if no good effects were apparent. Dr. Reynard would join in thanking her if Bertha's loving heart should prove wiser than his cool head. So, although she did not feel perfectly comfortable in thus disobeying orders, she regarded her fault lightly, as one of those acts which is gauged entirely by its result, pronounced worthy of all praise, if success attend it; punished as a grave misdemeanor, if failure be the finale.

On the same day upon which Dr. Gardiner had breakfasted at Aland the absinthe question was settled forever. Toward noon a heavy fall of rain began, and a cold northwest wind was blowing fiercely, rendering the passage of the galleries extremely uncomfortable. Miss Chevreul, Bertha, and Ralph were all seated around a brightly blazing fire in the small dining-room; the former reading, while Ralph sat patiently holding a skein of bright-colored worsted for Bertha to wind. She was talking to him eagerly and brightly, questioning principally, her interrogatories wandering over a wide area in the past, touching upon subjects she thought most likely to have remained impressed upon a boyish memory. To her delight he gave her almost universally correct replies.

Miss Chevreul, laying down her book, and rising from her chair, attracted Bertha's attention, and interrupted her conversation.

"Where are you going, Miss Rosine?" she asked.

"To the store-room, dear," said Miss Chevreul, drawing her shawl closer around her, and coughing as she spoke. "Your cousin's bottle of tonic is empty, and I wish to get a fresh one."

"Where is it kept?" asked Bertha, eagerly, jumping up as she spoke, for she had been waiting for this very moment. "Let me go and get it for you, it is so cold, and your cough is so troublesome to-day, that you shall

not stir from your chair unless for your own comfort." And with gentle force she pressed Rosine back into her seat.

"You are too good to me, Bertha, dear,—far too good," said Rosine, and her sad, brown eyes filled with tears, which she brushed hastily away with her wasted hand.

"Where is the tonic, dear?—I shall go and get it myself; but you mustn't call me good for not wanting any one with such a cough to go running round on such a day."

"It is in the locked pantry at the other end of the gallery, Bertha; it is in a wooden box, setting next to a candle-box; the bottles are all labeled 'tonic.'"

"Yes," said Bertha, with tightly-compressed lips, "tonic,—I shall find them. I could find them in the dark with such minute directions," she added, more lightly; for it was no part of her scheme to take Miss Chevreul into her confidence any more than Gus. Her reason for this was that she wished neither the timid Frenchwoman nor her aunt's slave to suffer in the remotest degree for what she should alone be held responsible for. Hence to keep them profoundly ignorant of her intentions was the way best to shield them from the wrath to come. She took the key to the locked pantry and traveled swiftly along the wet and slippery gallery. Entering, she closed the door after her. She soon had the box of absinthe singled out from its neighbors, and drawing the sliding wooden lid off, she glanced around in search of some missile of destruction. A pair of household scales, with removable iron weights, stood on the shelf above, immediately over the box containing the bottles. A slight inclination from a daring little hand and the whole apparatus came crashing in upon the frail bottles, reducing the entire contents of the box to a conglomerate mass of wet straw, displaced stoppers, and broken glass. That was easy enough, soliloquized the young girl, but the consequent explanatory fib will be harder.

Having accomplished the work of destruction to her satisfaction, she left the pantry and proceeded to the large dining-room, where she rapidly concocted a mixture from an egg, some white sugar, some rich cream, and the best of brandy, grating a little nutmeg on the top of the fragrant decoction. She retraced her steps to the small sitting-room to offer it as a substitute for the lost tonic.

"Why, what kept you so long?" asked Miss Chevreul, in surprise, as Bertha opened the door.

"I've been preparing a substitute," said the young girl, carelessly; "an accident has happened to cousin's entire box of tonic. In some way aunt's scales, that she uses in her cake-making, have been tumbled into the box, breaking every bottle."

There, thought Bertha, that is the truth, and nothing but the truth, if it is not the whole truth. I'm not called on to state that I was the some-way.

"Oh, terrible!" exclaimed Miss Chevreul, who belonged to that extensive class of females who use the most energetic expressions of fright and horror at the slightest domestic mischance.

"Terrible, is a strong word for the breaking of a few bottles," said Bertha, coolly, as she offered her substitute to her cousin.

"Yes, but your cousin's tonic, Bertha dear?"

"I will answer for it, my dear Miss Chevreul, that my cousin shall not suffer by the accident. See," she continued, "how immensely he enjoys my cream egg-nog. Grandpa used to make me prepare him one just that way every morning, and he said that dear papa had recommended him to take one every morning, as it was a great strengthener and fattener, and you know, Miss Rosine, papa was a physician himself." This with a proud little air of confidence in the wisdom of the parent who had been taken from her so long ago.

"Yes, my dear; but I think in the matter of this medicine it will be but right for me to inform your

uncle that the supply has been accidentally destroyed, so that he may send me up a fresh supply."

"Just as you please," said Bertha, indifferently; mentally adding, but that letter shall never reach its destination.

Miss Chevreul wrote the letter that night, and placed it, as was the custom of the house, in a small leathern satchel that hung by Dr. Reynard's desk in the library. Bertha, coming in a few moments after to deposit a letter of her own, extracted Miss Chevreul's, and, with a trembling hand, threw it into the blazing fire. A deep blush suffused her face at this, the first one of her acts that had savored of meanness.

"Stern necessity demands it," she murmured, "for your dear sake, my precious Ralph."

* * * * *

The three weeks of probation was at an end. Bertha had promised Miss Chevreul if, at the expiration of that time, the improvement in her cousin should not be so decided as to be apparent even to herself, she would discontinue her ministrations, and let the old daily routine be resumed. On the evening in question Ralph had retired to his rooms in a more equably cheerful state than ever before. Bertha had played for him a long time herself, and then she had cunningly contrived a fresh amusement for him.

Years before, Ralph, when quite a boy, had organized what he called his minstrel band. Composed of some half-dozen highly musical black boys, whom he had provided with violins, tambourines, banjos, and "bones." They had become passable performers in the course of time, and when they would collect around their cabin-doors of evenings and play some of their wild, sweet melodies, the music was of no mean order.

Bertha sent orders for them to come and play for their young master on this evening, and the summons was obeyed with alacrity. She had been afraid to try this experiment at first, for the music they made could

hardly be termed soothing, but as Dr. Gardiner had said he needed arousing, she thought she might venture.

The experiment had proved highly successful, Ralph evidently enjoying the rattling measures excessively, and recognizing the performers individually. When Bertha, fearful of prolonging the excitement too long, told them kindly that they had played quite long enough; her cousin, slipping his hand into his pocket, as was his boyish wont, pulled out a quantity of small silver pieces and distributed them among them. With a "thankee, little master, and God bless you," they shouldered their instruments and returned to their quarters. But the good effects of their homely music remained behind and added their mites toward strengthening the torpid faculties of the heir of Aland.

"And now, Miss Chevreul, I am ready to receive orders from you," began Bertha, when the two were left alone. "I promised you if at the end of three weeks Cousin Ralph had not improved perceptibly, that I would acknowledge that I was wrong and Dr. Reynard right. Has he improved, or has he not?"

"I think, my dear, no one could fail to see the improvement in him," was the ready reply.

"Is he more cheerful, or less so?" asked Bertha, who had prepared a little catechism, and was not to be cheated out of it by generalities.

"He is more so," replied the catechised.

"Is his appetite the better, or the worse, for the substitution of cream egg-nogs for ab—tonic?"

"I can see nothing to complain of, my dear, on the score of his appetite."

"Does Hiram report his nights as being quieter, or more restless latterly than formerly?"

"Why, Bertha, you heard what he said as well as I did, my child. He said that his master had been sleeping better for the last week than at any time before since his return home."

"One more question, mam'selle; don't get impa-

tient. You told me yourself that Dr. Gardiner was one of the most eminent medical men in your city. My aunt's husband was also a physician there, before he married her. Which of the two stands highest in your estimation as physicians?"

Rosine Chevreul reddened and remained silent.

"You need not be afraid to speak out plainly, Miss Rosine," said Bertha, mistaking the cause of her evident confusion. "I have no love for my stepuncle, to be wounded by a verdict unfavorable to his pretensions."

"I presume Dr. Gardiner stands the highest," said the Frenchwoman, hastily, anxious to get over this part of the catechism.

"Well, then, my dear old teacher, to ease you of the last qualm you may be suffering as to the propriety or impropriety of my proceedings, let me tell you that they have Dr. Gardiner's full sanction."

"What!" exclaimed Miss Chevreul, quickly and suspiciously. "Did you send for Dr. Gardiner to examine your cousin's case in the absence of the family?"

Bertha laughed at this wild conjecture. "No, mam'selle," she presently said, "I had never even heard of Dr. Gardiner's existence before he happened here the other night; but I certainly did describe Cousin Ralph's case to him, and ask him to notice him closely, and tell me what course of treatment he would suggest."

"Oh, Bertha, you are a daring girl!" said Miss Chevreul, half reproachfully half admiringly.

Bertha's only reply was a light laugh, and then she asked,—

"Well, am I to continue my attendance, or do you wish me to retire into solitary confinement once more?" The young girl spoke lightly, for her heart was full of new-born hope and buoyant with the prospect of Ralph's recovery.

"Why, my dear child, I think if your uncle was at home he would be the first to acknowledge how successful your efforts have been."

"Maybe so," interpolated Bertha.

"And, therefore, I can see no reason for asking you to discontinue them. I shall have to write to Dr. Reynard to-morrow," she continued.

"Why?" asked Bertha, quickly.

"Because he told me, my dear, that if there was any change at all in Mr. Barrow's condition I was to notify him by letter, and there has been such a decided change for the better that it will give me great pleasure to inform him of it."

Another letter to intercept, thought Bertha; how I do hate that part of it, it does seem so very small a meanness! I rather enjoy outwitting Dr. Reynard in other ways, but this thing of stealing letters is a detestable necessity.

So Miss Chevreul wrote another letter to Dr. Reynard, which Bertha consigned to the flames, as before, while Dr. Reynard was left in blissful ignorance that he was about to be outwitted by a slight, girlish creature, whom he could have crushed physically with one hard blow.

The position in which the self-made man found himself at this particular juncture was somewhat trying, to say the least of it. His rôle of model stepfather had necessitated his introducing his stepdaughter into the gay world, and he knew enough of the gay world not to trust to its disinterestedness where a wealthy young heiress was concerned. Innumerable suitors had already appeared for her hand; and, if he were to leave the field, for ever so short a time, some of the needy adorers would whisk her right off before the nice young man could say Jack Robinson. Therefore, while he skillfully maintained an appearance of perfect indifference as to Helen's choice of a husband, and treated all of her adorers with the most distinguished courtesy, he just as skillfully contrived that they, one after another, received a polite "no" when they so ardently pleaded for a sweet "yes."

To leave Helen was plainly out of the question; and,

as he was not blessed with ubiquity, to be with Ralph was as plainly out of the question. The worst that could happen in that quarter, however, would be Bertha talking and playing to him, and all she could do in three months he could easily undo in as many weeks ; but, in order to keep himself posted as to the progress of the young girl's counter-machinations, he had left strict orders that *any* change, whether for the better or the worse, should be reported to him by letter ; and it had been so reported, with what success we have seen.

That his plans promised to go aglee was certainly not his fault. For how could he imagine that Bertha Lombard's daring fingers would tamper with the vile compound that he looked upon as his most powerful ally ? or how could he imagine that a man at the head of the city faculty should be called miles and miles into the country to attend a wealthy old personal friend, and, returning to the river, be compelled, by an accident, to take shelter at Aland, and thus give Bertha an opportunity to procure disinterested and learned advice ? Or how much less could he imagine that the almost slavish obedience of the woman whom he had kept at Aland for a tool should succumb to the purifying effects of a better and higher love, and render her useless to him as a tool ? With all his getting, John Reynard had not gotten wisdom enough to foresee all these counter-chances.

Verily, verily, the way of the transgressor is hard.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A VOICE FROM THE GRAVE.

THE next difficulty that confronted Bertha Lombard in her self-appointed task was the very serious one of getting Ralph off on a visit to Dr. Gardiner before the family should return.

She was well aware that her only hope of working a cure in the poor boy lay in sending him away from Aland, and she was equally well aware that an end would be put to her own active operations so soon as Dr. Reynard should return; therefore, all that she was to do must be done in the absence of the family and without the authority of either of his legal guardians.

"Ah, how strange," she murmured, as she was pondering this troublesome question in the privacy of her own room,—“how strange that I dare not confide in his own mother, and tell her what so eminent a physician says! But she would only pronounce me crazy, too, and tell me coldly that she thinks I am overstepping the limits of propriety in offering an opinion or giving advice which conflicts with her husband's. She has such absolute faith in him that if I were to bring her positive proofs of his treachery, she would turn from me with that freezing dignity of hers, and tell me she really could not allow me so to malign so excellent a husband and stepfather. She is so cruelly cold she thinks poor Ralph has disgraced himself and his family, and so he is well fed and housed that is all she cares. Oh, I wonder what she is made of? I wonder if she and precious mamma were really born of the same parents? And Helen—no help there either, my poor Ralph; no, what I am to do I must do en-

tirely unaided, for they are for him and against us. But all the brooding in the world is not going to help me solve the difficulty of how to release him from this prison!" So, springing up, and brushing away the tears that had started while meditating on her cousin's sad condition, Bertha left her own room and went in search of her cousin, to make a proposal to him which she had been considering some few days past.

"Cousin," she said, coming behind him, as he sat broodingly over his sitting-room fire, and laying her soft little hands on his shoulders, "what do you say to a horseback ride this evening? The wet weather has put a stop to your walks, but wouldn't you like to ride old gray, with Black Laura and myself for company?"

Ralph's sad eyes fairly sparkled with pleasure. "Yes, yes," he exclaimed, "let us ride!" And he sprang up, with the impetuosity of a child, to carry the proposition into immediate execution.

"Not yet," said Bertha, smiling brightly at his glad eagerness, "it is very early in the morning, cousin. You know we have just finished breakfast, and I will have to tell Hiram to get the horses up from the lower pasture. We will go after dinner, and ride until sunset."

"Well," said her cousin, docilely. And he seated himself, with a quietly-patient look on his sad face that made Bertha feel vastly like crying.

"You are sorry to wait, are you not, Ralphy dear? But I will hurry Hiram and Richard and everybody."

"I will wait, miss," was the gentle reply, for Bertha was still to him a beautiful stranger, who was very kind to him, and very constant in her attentions, and whose presence was become an actual necessity for his peace of mind, but she was as yet nothing more. "He loved the beautiful stranger," he one day told Miss Chevreul, confidentially, "because she talked to him so sweetly of his dear little Bertha, and kept promising him that Bertha should come to see him soon."

"But she is Bertha herself, Mr. Barrow," Rosine had said, gently, endeavoring to establish the identity of the young girl.

"Oh, I know her name is Bertha, too!" replied the poor boy; "and I love her for that, too, and because her eyes are so like my little Bertha's; but my Bertha was a gay, laughing little mortal, and this beautiful lady's face is so sad, so sad. She is very beautiful, very beautiful, but she is not my Bertha. But I can wait, I can wait." And the wreck of Ralph Barrow would look pitifully wise and pathetically patient.

It was given up after this that it was useless to try to establish Bertha's identity, and he was allowed to address her, formally, as "miss," "young lady," or in any other way his crazed fancy suggested.

So Ralph and his unrecognized cousin took their horseback ride that evening, and came back with cheeks glowing and eyes sparkling from the invigorating exercise.

"We shall want the horses again to-morrow, Hiram," Miss Lombard had said, as they dismounted on their return, and threw the reins into the boy's hands. "In fact, you may saddle them every evening until I give you a contrary order."

"Your cousin seems to have enjoyed his ride vastly, Bertha," Miss Chevreul remarked, as Bertha made her appearance in the sitting-room.

"Yes," she replied, "I am sure he did; but as for myself, Miss Rosine, I am nearly frozen to death; this thin alpaca habit is not half warm enough for such an evening."

"You should have a cloth jacket to wear over it," suggested Rosine.

"That would be nice; but where in the world is the cloth to be found?"

"An old broadcloth coat would afford material sufficient, and I could fit you a close jacket, and help you make it in time for you ride to-morrow," said Miss Chevreul, kindly.

"You are a perfect jewel!" cried Bertha, enthusiastically. "I know I can find plenty of obsolete broad-cloth coats in the 'depository,' as we call aunt's old lumber-room, and you know it is an understood thing that the contents of that room are free to any member of the family who can find therein any article suited to their necessities."

"Yes," said Rosine, smiling, "I was thinking of the 'depository' when I spoke. The old cedar-chest, which stands in one corner of it, seems full of gentlemen's cast-off clothes, and I am sure there must be some black coats among them."

So to the "depository" Bertha went, candle in hand, and soon returned in triumphant possession of a broad-cloth coat of the cut of more than a decade previous, but admirably well suited to her purpose.

"Eureka!" she exclaimed, merrily, holding it up for Rosine's inspection.

"It will answer admirably," was the verdict passed upon it.

"Yes, but you are not to go to work on it to-night," said Bertha, as Miss Chevreul extended her hand for it. "You are to cut it and fit it, but I shall rip it up myself, and have it all pressed out by the time you are ready for it to-morrow." And she passed on to her own chamber, and, depositing her prize on her work-table, she returned to the sitting-room, and applied herself to her usual evening's task of amusing her cousin, in various ways, until his early bedtime.

That night, after the three had separated and repaired to their own apartments, Bertha drew her work-stand close to the fire, turned her lamp up higher, wheeled a chair close under it, and settled herself comfortably to the task of ripping up the old coat. With nimble fingers and sharp scissors she traveled rapidly from collar to sleeves, and from sleeves to binding, stirring up little clouds of fine dust that had accumulated and rested undisturbed, in seams and corners, through many a changing year. Finally, the tattered

silk lining was all that remained to be removed, and as Bertha dexterously separated it from the cloth, an unsealed envelope fell to the ground, which had evidently worked its way through the worn-out pocket of the coat, and found a resting-place between the cloth and the lining. As Bertha stooped over and picked it up a small slip of paper, carelessly folded, fluttered from it, and fell in its turn upon the rug.

Bertha glanced at the envelope in her hand. It was addressed to "John Reynard, M.D., New Orleans, La." The post-mark was entirely unfamiliar to her, and the date was indistinctly stamped.

"So this was his coat," murmured Bertha, as she stooped to pick up the inclosure. It was quite a small piece of paper, apparently half of a half-sheet, and as Bertha mechanically turned to the side on which the few words it contained were written, the idle curiosity which had tempted the move was startled into active interest as the opening words caught her eye:

"I am dying, Paul,—dying, without a friend near me."

Bertha's eye glanced from these pitiful words to the signature; it was Otis Barrow's. She gave a start of pained surprise; then she went back and read the whole of it:

"I am dying, Paul,—dying, without a friend near me. Look after my children. See that the laws of Louisiana are fairly administered in their behalf. I ask no better will. Good-by, old friend. Pray God you may never know the desolation and the loneliness that are my portion in this the hour of my extremity, and go down on your knees and thank Him that Agnes Snowe said 'no' to you twelve years ago, instead of 'yes.'"

Scratched on the reverse side was, "Paul Winchester, P—— County, New York."

"Uncle Otis's last words," said Bertha, solemnly. "How came they in Dr. Reynard's possession? and why have they not been sent to the person to whom they were addressed? Winchester! Winchester!" she murmured. "Wasn't that the name of the gentleman

who wrote such a beautiful letter to Aunt Agnes after Uncle Otis died? I heard mamma tell about it. Why has this been kept, instead of being sent to him?" And Bertha leaned her elbow upon the table and fell into a deep reverie.

But all her thinking could not untangle the mystery. She had never heard the name of the physician who had attended her uncle in his last illness, and, in fact, she had been such a mere child when that event happened, that all the attendant circumstances had entirely faded from her recollection. The name of "Winchester" she dimly recognized as being the one she had more than once heard her mother mention as belonging to a very near and dear relative and friend of her dead uncle's. That no intercourse had been held with him since her aunt's second marriage she felt sure of, and why? This finding of her uncle's last written words in a coat that had once belonged to Dr. Reynard could mean but one thing, and that one thing was that Mr. Winchester, for some unknown reason, was a person Dr. Reynard preferred having no dealings with.

Bertha was too unlearned in the world's ways to suspect guilt at every turn. Suspicion of Dr. Reynard had been forced upon her by the remarkable course he had pursued with his afflicted stepson; but in her guilelessness she could penetrate no farther into the mystery of this letter than to see that for some cause it had been withheld from Mr. Winchester.

"I know not, nor do I care to know, what this all means," was her final conclusion; "but I do know that Uncle Otis has spoken to me from the grave, telling me where to find a friend for his poor boy. Surely I must be doing right, for God first sent Dr. Gardiner to help and advise me, and now, here comes this letter back from the buried past, telling my poor cousin just where to go to find a friend,—a true and powerful friend. Ah! yes, surely, Heaven is smiling upon my efforts."

Once more she read the hastily-scribbled note over;

then, rising, she locked it securely away in her writing-desk to be used when the right time came.

* * * * *

The family were to return to Aland early in March. Six weeks only remained to Bertha in which to mature her plans. The one thing needful was to find some one to take charge of Ralph, and see him safely under Dr. Gardiner's care. Once in that good man's hands Bertha felt sure his recovery would be both speedy and sure. To get him there would be easy enough; that portion of her love's labor was performed. But it was, and for some time would be, utterly out of the question for him to travel unattended. A fitting companion was the one grand desideratum. It must be a white person, for Bertha would not stoop to tamper with her aunt's slaves. It must be a trustworthy person, for to explain the necessity for this strange proceeding would compel partial confidence. It must be an incorruptible person, for Dr. Reynard was to be kept ignorant of Ralph's whereabouts. It must be a fearless person, for otherwise Dr. Reynard could intimidate him into telling all he knew.

Where the individual was found who combined all these desirable qualifications and who he was, I will reserve for another chapter.

CHAPTER XL.

A RIVAL TO BE FEARED.

"MAMMA, don't you think young Mr. Rockbridge the very handsomest man you ever saw?"

The above-recorded invidious interrogatory was propounded by Miss Barrow to Mrs. Reynard, as the Reynard party dallied over their hotel breakfast as only the wealthy drones of this world can afford to dally. The Reynard party consisted of Dr. Reynard and lady, Miss Helen Barrow, and the inevitable Mr. James Reynard. Miss Barrow was looking charmingly fresh and freshly charming in a becoming morning *négligé*; and Mr. Reynard had just kindly made up his small modicum of mind, and concluded it would be very possible to live happily with the little monkey notwithstanding some little peculiarities of temper, when she startled him out of his complacent security by her animated eulogium on handsome Horace Rockbridge.

"The very handsomest, daughter?" replied Mrs. Reynard; "that is very unqualified praise for a young lady to bestow upon a young gentleman."

"Well, but, mamma, I think so, and why not say so? Of course I have no notion of turning his head by telling him I think so, though," she retorted.

"How does my little daughter know that a pretty compliment from a pretty girl would be all-sufficient to turn young Rockbridge's head?" asked Dr. Reynard, banteringly.

"Oh, because," said Helen, saucily,— "of course he is insufferably vain; all young men are, are they not, Mr. Reynard?" And she turned with a look of innocent inquiry to the nice young man on her left.

"I suppose," retorted Mr. Reynard, who, when very much exasperated, ventured upon a little retaliatory bit of snapping, "Miss Barrow wishes us to understand that that head must be unusually well balanced which can retain its equilibrium under the intoxicating influence of her favorable notice."

"Miss Barrow wishes you to understand," was the tart rejoinder, "that she considers you a rude savage, and wishes to have nothing more to say to you for the day!" And, with a pout, she turned the cold shoulder upon him, and resumed the Rockbridge subject animatedly,—

"Oh, mamma! he is such a magnificent-looking fellow!—so splendidly large! Ah, I do adore a large man!"

The extinguished Mr. Reynard thought, with a melancholy sigh, of his own Tappertitian proportions, and, with an envious one, of Mr. Rockbridge's six foot of manhood.

"Ye-es, he is certainly large enough; no one can deny that," was Mrs. Reynard's indifferent reply to Helen's rhapsodies.

"But then, mamma, his size is not all. He has such a fine, frank face, such merry, blue eyes, and, oh! such a mouth and such teeth!"

"Who is this young Adonis, my love?" ventured Dr. Reynard.

"He is a nephew of that Mrs. Rockbridge whose plantation is just eight miles from Aland, papa. He says his aunt has often pressed him cordially to spend a month or two with her, when the fishing is good in the spring; but that hitherto he has always begged off from the old lady, but that now, since he has found she has such pleasant neighbors, he shall certainly pay her a visit this spring, just to fish, you know. The pleasant neighbors means you and mamma," she added, demurely.

"We shall be most happy to receive him at Aland," said the autocrat, speaking in the conjugal number.

"I doubt not but the young man will find fishing in

the neighborhood of Aland both pleasant and profitable," ventured Mr. Reynard, emerging from under the extinguisher Helen had placed upon him awhile back.

Helen clapped the extinguisher on again. "As Mr. Rockbridge does not propose wasting his time on minnows, Mr. Reynard need have no personal fears."

"Helen, I am ashamed of you!" cried Mrs. Reynard.

"Yes, mamma, we all know you are. But what right has he to insinuate that Mr. Rockbridge is coming to fish for me, and expects to find it profitable?"

Mr. Reynard protested and apologized.

Miss Barrow pouted and scorned his apologies.

Then he tried his hand at a little bit of diplomacy.

"Will you forgive me if I tell you a secret?"

"What secret?" asked the young lady, still pouting, but relenting slightly at the sound of that so-potent word.

"I love to anger you,—that is my secret."

"And pray, may I ask why?" freezing again.

"Because, you are so handsome when you are angry. Your eyes flash, and that saucy little nose looks so defiant, and your lips were made for pouting, anyhow, you know."

At this neat little stroke, Helen's lips gave evidence that they were made for something better than ugly words and naughty pouting, for they curved themselves involuntarily into a smile of gratified vanity.

"Come, mamma, let us leave him; he is so hateful."

The quartette left the dining-room,—the ladies remounting to their apartments, the two brothers proceeding toward the smoking-room.

"You extricated yourself from that scrape with a little more dexterity than I gave you credit for possessing, my lad; but let me give you a piece of advice and an item of information," began Dr. Reynard.

"Let's have them; you're good at the former, John. I'll be hanged if you ain't as full of advice as an egg is of meat!"

Mr. Reynard never sacrificed force to elegance in his similes.

"Don't trifle away your exceedingly slender chance of making my stepdaughter like you," replied his brother, coldly,—*"that is my piece of advice. My item of information is that this Rockbridge is a rival to be feared."*

"Do you know, John," said contumacious James, *"that I think whoever does finally catch that little minx will be more an object of pity than of envy?"*

"What do you mean, sir?" savagely demanded his brother.

"Nothing, John,—nothing. You're so infernally hasty! I only meant that she has such an uncommonly peppery temper. But if she was triple extract of Cayenne itself, I'd go in for her, and win her, too, if I could; so you needn't fly off at the handle any more, John; at least, I wouldn't, if I was you, with so many people around, you know."

Dr. Reynard took the hint, and quickly readjusted his facial mask, which had become slightly disordered in his heat, and threatened a disclosure of the dark, true face beneath. Then he spoke again,—

"Your peace is only half made, let me tell you. I know her better than you do."

"What in the deuce shall I do?" asked the delinquent.

"She goes to the opera to-night. Send her a bouquet of white japonicas to dress her hair and corsage with."

"Japonicas cost like the devil," said the needy suitor, ruefully. "They are a dollar apiece, and one single flower would buy me half a dozen good cigars. Won't one do? Isn't a whole bunch of 'em coming it rather strong, John?" And the nice young man sighed.

Dr. Reynard's bearded lip curled with scorn ineffable. He was ashamed of possessing such a picayunish brother.

"You deserve to starve," he said, contemptuously. Then he put his hand into the pocket-book which Otis Barrow had filled for him, and extracted a ten-dollar bill. "Here, buy your bouquet with this."

"Thank you, John, thank you! I declare you are a real trump! Eight dollars will do for the japonicas, and the other two will do for cigars. I am really a thousand times obliged to you! *Au revoir*. I believe we are to take the ladies to Victor's at twelve." And, with an airy bow, the mendicant in broadcloth turned down a by-street, and was soon out of sight of his benefactor.

"Quite a neat little speculation," quoth James the little to himself. "But why in the devil is he so set upon my marrying the little monkey? Now, if it was her cousin,—glorious Bertha!—ah, then, by Jove! it would be heaven!"

"Is he most knave or fool?" asked John the great of himself. "Curse him! Does he suppose I am so determined on this match for his benefit? Fool, I am going to marry them because he is the only safe husband for her! I want no d—d inquisitive Paul Prys around me!"

That evening, while Miss Barrow was making a *grande toilette* for the French opera, a magnificent bouquet of pure white japonicas was brought to her door, in the heart of which she found a card, and on the card she found these words,—

"I send these pure white blossoms as a flag of truce. If they are worn about your person to-night I shall consider myself received once more into favor. Their absence I shall take as an indication that my unpardonable impertinence is still unforgiven.

"Your devoted slave,

"J. REYNARD."

Scarcely had Helen time to admire the beautiful flowers, and read the accompanying *billet-doux*, before another knock heralded another floral offering. This time it was a small cluster of crimson japonicas, encircling one pure waxen blossom. It, too, held a card. H. Rockbridge sent with it his "votive offering to the

queen of hearts," and begged her to let his flowers adorn her gracious person that evening, and by their presence give token that the donor was not utterly insignificant in her eyes. The beauty of the white blossoms paled before the glory of the red as nice James Reynard had paled before handsome Horace Rockbridge.

"How beautiful!" murmured the young lady, audibly.

"Yes, mam'selle," said Susanne, considering herself personally addressed; "the rouges are *brillantes* very much; they are *charmantes*! they wear with mam'selle's corn-silk *ce soir* most beautifully! mam'selle could wear not the whites, for they make all things to look most pale with the lovely corn-silk, and the *brillantes* rouges, mam'selle, look most lovely!"

Poor Susanne had been a resident of America just long enough to imbibe its pervading spirit of reckless audacity, which had engendered the idea that the art of speaking good English consisted exclusively in dislocating sentences, divorcing verbs from their subjects, and in flinging in adjectives as independent candidates for any position whichsoever they might find vacant.

Susanne was Helen's priestess of the toilet, for, added to her native exquisite French taste, she had been once upon a time the employee of a French modiste; so, of course, she "knew all about everything," and was the one human being to whom Miss Barrow meekly submitted. So that night Miss Barrow appeared at the opera in corn-silk and crimson japonicas. The two young men, who had so carefully worded their individual aspirations that she should wear their colors, would have felt decidedly cheap had they known that their fate had been left entirely in the hands of Miss Barrow's maid, and that the queen of hearts had decided on the red flowers simply because they "went" best with the corn-silk.

At the first fall of the curtain Miss Barrow's box was crowded as usual. Mr. Rockbridge was fortunate enough to arrive before any of her other adorers, and

as he bowed his tall head over the little lady, to thank her for wearing his flowers, Mr. James Reynard made his appearance on the other side of her chair.

"Red japonicas!" was his mental exclamation; "the devil! there's eight dollars gone for nothing."

Helen saw the angry flush on his face, and the spirit of coquettish mischief entered in and took possession of her for the rest of that evening.

"Oh, thank you so much for your beautiful flowers!" she said, with *empressement* to Mr. Rockbridge. "How could you have imagined so exactly the color I prefer?"

Mr. Reynard spoke before Mr. Rockbridge could concoct a reply, which was neither polite nor wise of Mr. Reynard.

"Then the pure white japonica finds no favor in your eyes?"

"Not often." She turned a look of merry insolence upon him. "A bouquet of dead white blossoms, with nothing to relieve their ghastliness, is so suggestive of coffins and graves and dead persons, you know. I do so like warm and bright things. Scarlet, you know, is such a cheerful color."

Upon which Mr. Rockbridge and Miss Barrow rambled off upon a general dissertation on the respective merits of red, white, and variegated japonicas. Flowers naturally suggested nature,—nature naturally suggested the country,—the country naturally suggested Mr. Rockbridge's old aunt,—Mr. Rockbridge's old aunt naturally suggested the proposed visit to the Silver Lake neighborhood.

"Ah! if you are fond of hunting, I am sure you can manage to pass a month in our dull neighborhood quite endurably, for, when the spring rise fills the low back lands and the deer are driven to seek higher ground, our hunting is not to be despised. Mr. Reynard will be at Aland this spring, on one of his annual visits to a pretty cousin of mine up there, and I know it will give him great pleasure to pilot you through our woods and introduce you to the best stands." And

she airily waved her fan toward her enraged victim, by way of including him in the conversation.

"I am sure I shall be most delighted," began polite Mr. Rockbridge.

But forbearance had ceased to be a virtue, and all the soul that was contained in the small body of Mr. James Reynard rose in virtuous indignation. To be coolly consigned to pauper Bertha was more than even he could, would, or should stand. His small black eyes twinkled with exasperation, as he muttered, in a suppressed voice,—

"Is it not enough, mademoiselle, that you should slight my flowers for his, without making a butt of me for his amusement?"

"Slight your gift?" said his tormentor, innocently. "Indeed, I did nothing of the kind. I told Susanne to be sure and put them in water; and as there were so many of them, you know, and I had given her leave to go to a ball to-night with her sweetheart, I gave her just one little one to wear in her bonny black hair. I knew you had such a good heart that you wouldn't care, and you don't, do you?"

She turned her head on one side and looked at him with saucily-coaxing eyes.

"Certainly not!" said the infuriated gallant, pulling his moustache savagely. "Why not have given them all to your maid?"

"All!" exclaimed Helen, in well-affected horror. "Why, my dear Mr. Reynard, you surely would not have my poor Susanne go to a ball looking like a market-woman, with a mammoth drumhead cabbage for sale?" And the insolent minx looked severely reproachful.

This last indignity was too much for the exasperated swain. He seized his hat, and with a stiff bow to the occupants of the box, he hurried out to cool his wrath at a safe distance from his tormentor.

Dr. Reynard, who had been watching this little by-play from the rear of the box, left his seat and joined his brother as he was hastily elbowing his way out.

"Why such haste, my boy?" he asked, coolly laying his hand on James's shoulder. James continued his headlong retreat, until they stood side by side upon the banquette.

"I say, John, I wouldn't marry that little minx in yonder; no, not if her fortune was ten, instead of one million."

"And I say, James," replied John, "you are certainly the biggest fool that ever disgraced the name of Reynard. What is it now?"

"Nothing, except that she has been making a butt of me the whole evening for the benefit of Rockbridge and Company, and I'll be d—d if I stand it any longer!"

"What did she say?"

"Told me to my face that the bouquet I sent her looked like a mammoth drumhead cabbage."

"I don't believe you," was the cool rejoinder.

"Then, I suppose, I am a liar as well as a fool," was the angry retort.

"You are so much of the latter," said his brother, sneeringly, "that I feel strongly tempted to leave you to your fate, which would be ultimate starvation; instead of which I am determined to force happiness and fortune upon you in spite of yourself, and I say that you *shall* marry Helen Barrow,—do you understand?"

"Monstrous kind of you, 'pon honor; but the prospect doesn't elate me a particle. I say, John, what in the deuce makes you so bent on this thing?"

"Has your anger cooled enough for you to return to Helen's box?" was John's only answer.

"I suppose so," was the reply, in a voice of dogged indifference.

"Well, then, go back and make yourself as agreeable as possible, instead of putting your boorish ill-breeding in direct contrast with Horace Rockbridge's refined polish."

Things must be brought to a crisis before another month, thought the arch-schemer as he laid him down to sleep that night.

"I'll bring things to a crisis when I go up to pay aunt a visit, this spring," said Horace Rockbridge to himself as he mounted to his room.

"Things are coming to a crisis when Mr. Reynard can afford to put on the airs of an accepted lover before everybody," muttered Helen, angrily throwing aside her out-door wrappings.

"Things are coming to a crisis," murmured James Reynard, as he turned the key on the inside of his door, "and I don't care a red which way the cat jumps."

CHAPTER XLI.

JACK BOLTON.

THE Tanglewood plantation, which, modest as it was in comparison with most of the lordly estates that bordered upon Silver Lake, had been amply sufficient to keep Bertha Lombard (into whose possession it had passed at the time of Major Snowe's death) from feeling in any respect like a dependent upon her aunt's cold charity.

Of course, Madame Verzenay and Mrs Reynard were co-heirs with the lonely little orphan girl; but, as they both had a much larger share of worldly possessions than they really knew what to do with, and as the meager little property, if partitioned, would amount to nothing for each one individually, with an exertion of generosity unparalleled in their supremely selfish lives, they consented to let the poor old plantation pass intact to Becky's child.

So Tanglewood plantation was Miss Lombard's fortune; and it was one of her regular weekly duties to have herself rowed across the lake, in order that she might see personally to the wants of certain old pen-

sioners,—faithful servants of the dear ones who were gone,—whom she considered had a life-claim on her kindness and attention. It was during one of these visits that she accidentally discovered the individual for whom she was so eagerly searching, a man “*sans peur et sans reproche*” morally, though very little of a chevalier in appearance.

Miss Lombard knew that the management of her place had been left in the hands of the same overseer who had held office so creditably during her father’s and grandfather’s lifetime; but, besides hearing him casually spoken of at Aland as an excellent manager, she had rarely ever heard his name mentioned. She was indebted purely to chance for the discovery that under the rough exterior of her plantation manager there was as fearless a soul and as kindly a heart as ever lacked the possession of a broadcloth coat to constitute him a gentleman.

Bertha, on the visit during which she made this happy discovery, had gone to the cabin of an old couple, man and wife, who had spent the greater portion of their lives, the former as coachman and general man-of-all-work in the yard, and the latter as cook, up to the time of Major Snowe’s death. Being, both of them, far advanced in life, and really past the age for active usefulness, they had been recommended to his heirs as objects deserving of the kindest treatment and exemption from hard work. These two old people were Bertha’s especial pets, and she never failed to pay them a visit once a week. On this occasion she found them both comfortably hobnobbing over their own cabin-fire, in luxurious enjoyment of their pipes and making generous display of a new supply of bright red flannel,—the one in his shirt-sleeves, the other in a quilted petticoat.

“Oh, how cosy we do look!” said Bertha, merrily, as she stepped over the low cabin threshold, looking her own name—“bright and beautiful.”

“God bless your purty face!” said old Betsy, taking

her pipe out of her mouth ; and, rising, she wiped off a chair with her check apron and placed it near the fire for her young mistress.

" Ah ! I'm so glad to see you and Uncle Jake in nice new flannel before the real cold weather sets in."

" Yes'm," said old Betsy, with a peculiar grunt, significant of something behind.

" You Betsy, jes' you hold your tongue, old womin ; I tole you as how you'd be pesterin' little mistiss wid that complaint soon's ever she comed to see us !"

" Well, Jake," retorted Aunt Betsy, " ain't little mistiss de one for us to go to wid our grievances, anyhow ? say, ole man !"

" Ain't you done got the flannin, and got it on your back, you cantankerous ole nigger ?" said Uncle Jake, angrily.

" Yes, I is, thanks to Mr. Bolton ; but——"

" But what does all this mean ?" asked Bertha, looking, in surprise, from one to the other.

" Don't 'mount to nothin', missy ; Betsy is a techy ole crittur ; but she knows nary nigger on dis place gwine suffer for want as long as de Lord lets Mr. Bolton live."

" Yes ; but, Uncle Jake," said Bertha, " it is *my* place to see that you do not want ; therefore I insist that either you or Aunt Betsy tell me what this is about flannel."

" Thar, now," said Aunt Betsy, triumphantly, " didn't I been tellin' you that missy warn't gwine to let her niggers be 'posed upon ?"

" Well, ole womin, tune up," said Uncle Jake, with an air of resignation ; " but, in de meanwhiles, I'll go out-do's an' finish my pipe, for I knows it gwine take you two blessed hours ov dis day ov our Lord to git through tellin' mistiss 'bout dat flannin. She's ben mos' bustin', missy, to tell you for more'n a month, but I would'n' 'low her." And, with an air of dignified superiority, Uncle Jake made his way to a bench on the outside of his cabin, and sat there smoking and nod-

ding in the bright sunshine, a picture of perfect comfort and contentment.

"Now, then, Aunt Betsy." And the young lady settled herself into an attitude of patient attention.

"Well, then, my little mistiss, you mus' know that me an' Jake is nothin' more'n two ole wore-out niggers what ain't got no more hard work in 'em, missy, but life is jes' as sweet to two good-for-nothin' ole niggers as mos' anybody else, chile."

"Who wants you to work, Aunt Betsy?" asked Bertha. "Is it Mr. Bolton?"

"Lord love your soul, chile, de blessed sun ov heaven don't shine on no more juster nor better man than Mr. Bolton!"

"Well, but what about the flannel?" said Bertha, impatiently.

"I'se a comin' to that, honey, I'se a comin'. Lord love yo' purty face, but you is a impatien' one. Well, den, you know, wen Mars' Ranar' and Miss Agnis bese startin' down for de city, Mr. Bolton he makes out a lis' ov what de plantation stan' in need of, such as pork, an' 'lasses, an' Lowells, an' shoes, an'——"

"Yes," said Bertha, interrupting the catalogue of items, "I know,—but the flannel."

"Well," said Aunt Betsy, brought back thus summarily to her text, "I 'spose 'mong toddler things he writ down flannin and 'backer for Jake and Betsy, an' he gived the paper to my son Bill to carry to Mars' Ranar', and Bill say he reckon as how somethin' had put mars' doctor out ov sorts 'fore he got thar, for he cuss like blazes when Bill handid him de paper, and say Mr. Bolton was makin' fools ov all de niggers over here, anyhow, a pamperin' 'em up wid 'lasses an' sech like; an' he tole Bill to tell Mr. Bolton that he'd see ole Jake and ole Betsy in—in a mighty hot place, honey, war dey don't need no flannin, chile, 'fore he'd buy any red flannin for two ole, wore-out, good-for-nothin's like me and Jake. Well, chile, long as he tole Bill to tell Mr. Bolton, Bill he comed home

an' tole him. Mr. Bolton he jes' got red in de face, an' he say, 'Never mind, Bill, I 'spose de doctor was out ov sorts; he'll send de flannin.' An' no more was said 'bout it den; but, sho' 'nough, chile, wen de things comed no flannin war thar, but wat should Mr. Bolton do but take de money out ov his own pocket, little mistiss, and puts Bill on a mule, an' sen's him to town for dis ve'y red flannin wat you sees me an' Jake a-wearin' of; an' wen he brung it to us he say, 'Here, ole folks, your dead master was a good, kind friend to me when I needed one, an' he thought enough of you two to speak of you on his death-bed, an' you sha'n't suffer as long as Jack Bolton's anywhars nigh you.' "

Bertha Lombard's eyes were sparkling brightly, partly with indignation at Dr. Reynard's harsh treatment of her old pensioners, and partially in admiration of Mr. Bolton's kindness of heart.

"Aunt Betsy, you did perfectly right in telling me this," she said to the old woman, "and I want to tell you now, that if ever in the future you have just cause to feel yourself unkindly treated, you must not hesitate to tell me of it plainly; for you and Uncle Jake were faithful servants to the dear ones who are gone, and I should be acting a most ungrateful part by you if I let you suffer for anything. Dr. Reynard is managing for me, as I understand nothing of business; but your personal comfort is my concern, and not his."

"You hear dat, Jake?" asked the old woman, in a triumphant voice; "an' you'se ben makin' me hole my tongue for a long time, ole man."

"I was actin' under orders, ole womin," said Uncle Jake, poking his head in at the cabin-door.

"Whose orders, Uncle Jake?" asked Bertha.

"Mr. Bolton's, missy."

"What were Mr. Bolton's orders?"

"Nothin', missy, 'scept he said to me, 'I say, Jake, you know ole Betsy's a great hand to tell Miss Berthy everything, wen she comes over, and this little affa'r

'bout the flannin 'twon't do no good to tell; 'twill jes' make her think hard ov them as she's 'bleeged to live wid, po' chile, an' we can spar' her that pain; she's had morn her sheer, anyhow.' "

"Did Mr. Bolton really say all that, Uncle Jake?"

"Every word ov it, missy."

"Then he is modest and thoughtful, as well as kind-hearted, and I want to see him myself, before I go back over the lake, to thank him."

"He's all you sez, an' mo', mistiss; an' thar he goes right now to de house."

Bertha sprang up quickly, and crossing the quarter lot by the nearest path toward the house, she came up to it by the time Mr. Bolton, who was getting to be quite an elderly man, had dismounted and walked slowly and heavily toward the house. He was an ordinary-looking man, large, and powerfully built, with great brawny hands and clumsily-booted feet of more than medium dimensions. His well-shaped head was covered with a thick suit of coarse, sandy hair, and a pair of shaggy, light eyebrows overhung the one pleasant feature of his face—his mild blue eyes, that looked as if they might more appropriately have belonged to some gentle-hearted woman than a great, rough man. He looked a little surprised to see Bertha standing there on his own steps; for, in her flying visits to the plantation, she generally came and went without his seeing her.

"Miss Berthy, most proud to see you, mum," was his uncouth salutation, as he raised his hat respectfully to the young mistress of Tanglewood.

Bertha held out a soft, white hand, saying, sweetly, "I want to shake hands with you, Mr. Bolton, and thank you for your kindness to Uncle Jake and Aunt Betsy."

"She's ben an' told you, has she?" asked the old man, as he held the little white blossom of a hand timidly in a momentary clasp. "I tried to make her hold her tongue, miss; but I think ef she couldn't spin

some yarn every time you comed over, it would make her sick."

"I think she did perfectly right, Mr. Bolton, for otherwise I never should have had an opportunity of showing you how I appreciate your goodness of heart."

"Don't speak of it, Miss Berthy, in that light, I beg you, mum. Jack Bolton come to this neighborhood well on to twenty-five year ago, and Major Snowe tuk him in, without knowin' nothin' at all about him, and give him work; and when, by reason of the climate, I was plaguey no account for the first two or three years, he doctored me and tuk care of me, like I was kin to him, and I'd have to be a precious black-hearted scoundrel if I could see even a dog that he had keered for suffering,—and I know he did keer more than a heap for them two old darkies,—and I ain't doing nothin' more than I ought to do, miss, in takin' good care of them."

"Gratitude combined with modesty and generosity," thought Bertha; "I have found a rough diamond."

"An' while we're talking of the good old man that's gone, Miss Berthy," resumed the manager, "please let me take this chance to say, young lady, that thar's nothin' that Jack Bolton could be called on to do that he wouldn't most gladly do to pay back to you—the little one they all loved so dear—some small portion of the big debt he owes to them that's gone."

A bright, glad light flashed into Bertha's beautiful eyes, and her last perplexity about Ralph melted before the earnest sincerity of the great, rough man standing before her.

"Oh, Mr. Bolton!" she exclaimed eagerly, "you have it in your power to more than cancel your debt, right now, by doing me the very greatest kindness."

"Speak the words, miss, an' it shall be done, if mortal man kin do it."

Bertha's next words took him rather aback:

"Mr. Bolton, if I was to ask you to help me do something in secret,—something entirely unauthorized by my so-called guardians, something, in fact, decid-

edly against their wishes,—what would you say and do?”

The poor man stood rubbing his work-hardened hands together in sad perplexity for a moment without answering a word; then the clouds of doubt floated away from his plain features and honest eye, and looking down upon the beautiful face upturned to his with such a brightly inquiring glance, he replied, very gently,—

“I should ‘say,’ Miss Berthy, that old Mr. Snowe’s granddaughter and Miss Rebecca’s child *couldn’t* wander very far from the right way, and I should ‘do’ on-hesitatingly whatsoever she might ask me to do.”

“Shake hands with me again, Mr. Bolton,” cried Bertha, with shining eyes, “for the sake of the dear ones you appreciated so justly.” And again a snowflake of a hand fluttered into Jack Bolton’s great, brown palm, in token of good fellowship between the high-bred young lady and her honest employee. “Now another question, Mr. Bolton. What do you think of my aunt’s husband, Dr. Reynard?”

“Miss Berthy,” said the poor man, his honest face again in a pucker, “I don’t exactly see the drift of the catechism you’re a puttin’ me through; but please don’t ask me any more questions, miss, which I can’t answer with a upright, downright ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ The Bible tells us, I believe, to ‘judge not, less’n we be judged,’ and I’d much ruther leave Dr. Reynard an’ his affairs to the Lord A’mighty; excuse me, therefore, for not answering your last question.”

“Oh,” said Bertha, laughing, “that’s as much as I want to hear. Now, then, Mr. Bolton, I will tell you quickly and plainly what I want you to do for me. I may be doing Dr. Reynard a cruel injustice,—God forgive me if I am,—but his whole course, since my Cousin Ralph’s return from Europe, has tended so directly toward keeping him in his present helpless condition that, horrible as it sounds, I am forced to think that, in order to retain possession of my cousin’s fortune, he is keeping him in it. I am compelled, in my efforts to assist

poor Ralph, to act in direct opposition to Dr. Reynard's orders, for when he is at home he will not even let me associate with the poor boy. I have had the advice of one of the most eminent physicians in New Orleans, since the family left, and he begged me, if possible, to get permission for Cousin Ralph to pay him a visit. He says if he can have him under his own roof for a month or two he will guarantee a cure. He is not able to travel without an attendant. If he goes at all it must be before the doctor returns. Will you go with him, Mr. Bolton?"

"You are asking a right tight thing of me, Miss Berthy, for it looks underhanded."

"Very well, then," said Bertha, disconsolately, "my poor cousin will have to drag out his miserable existence in virtual imprisonment for the want of one true friend."

"I'll do it, miss! I'll do it!" exclaimed poor Bolton, desperately; "no harm can come of it to the poor lad, I suppose. He's of age, anyhow, and I reckon he's got as good a right as anybody to visit Orleans; and I reckon Jack Bolton's got as good a right as anybody to go down to Orleans, too, on the same boat. We're both free, white, and twenty-one, and it'll be nobody's business if Jack Bolton should see proper to stick tolerable close to Mr. Barrow while the two is together on the same boat."

Bertha was immensely amused at this off-hand method of divesting the journey of its conspiracy air. "Ah! you will go, then?" she exclaimed, gladly.

"Jack Bolton's not the man, Miss Berthy, to blow big guns about gratitude, and devotion, etc., and then back down when the first chance to prove hisself comes."

"Remember," said the pretty conspirator, warningly, "Dr. Reynard is not to know where he is, for he could go right there, prove poor Ralph was not in his right mind and still in need of a guardian, and so get him back in his clutches."

"Wild horses sha'n't pull a word from me," valiantly

replied Mr. Bolton, who, once committed, was prepared for any amount of duplicity. "You know," he continued, "that after I've seen Mr. Ralph to his friend's house, I'll forget whar the house is and what the name of his friend is; and who can quarrel with a man for forgettin'?"

"Now, then," said Bertha, "I do not intend you shall have any more of the burden of my iniquitous proceedings on your shoulders than I can possibly avoid, so, after this, you shall hear not a word until Cousin Ralph and his trunk come right over here to you, for I want you to take the boat above here, and not at our usual landing. You will take it after dark."

"All right, miss, I'm acting under your orders now, and ef you was to tell me to swim across the Mississippi with the poor boy on my back, I'd die tryin' it."

"Why, Mr. Bolton," laughed Bertha, "you're made of the stuff they used to make knights-errant of."

"I don't know, miss," replied her knight, innocently. "I only know I hope the night's errand you're sending me on may turn out for good and not for harm."

"Ah! you shall never, never regret it, I promise you beforehand; and, if it is a sin, the sin is mine, not yours."

"If it is a sin, Miss Berthy, you'll have to pray us both out ov the scrape, for Jack Bolton's a sight better at maulin' rails than he is at prayin'."

"Mr. Bolton, your faith in Mr. Snowe's granddaughter and Miss Rebecca's child must be mere lip-faith, after all, else you would believe that, although she is obliged to combat treachery with seeming treachery, she could not ask you to help her in anything she would be ashamed of those same dear ones looking down upon." With this earnest vindication of her course, the young girl closed her interview with her new ally, and passed out to the skiff that was in waiting for her.

"You will keep mamma's old barouche and a pair of horses in readiness, please, so that you can start at a moment's notice."

"All right, Miss Bertha; and you may depend on Jack Bolton for keepin' his tongue under padlock, both now and hereafter."

The little skiff shot out into the lake, and Jack Bolton retraced his steps to his house, muttering to himself,—

"Curse him! it's a good thing for the poor boy that thar's one member of the family sharp enough to see through him, and sharp enough to outwit him, too, hang Jack Bolton if she ain't."

CHAPTER XLII.

OUTWITTED.

THE "season" was fairly over, and but one week more remained of the allotted time of their stay for the Reynards to dispose of before they should return to the dull monotony of plantation life, and nothing but the knowledge that Mr. Rockbridge was to follow her very speedily consoled Mademoiselle Hélène for the terrible prospect.

It is a marvelous, but none the less an established fact, that let a couple of fashionable women spend one, two, three, or four months within the proximity of dry-goods stores, and two-thirds of that one, two, three, or four months will most inevitably be spent in the luxurious pleasure of shopping.

"Lives there a woman with soul so dead" who cannot appreciate the exquisite, but indescribable pleasure of spending hour upon hour within the sacred precincts of some temple of fashion, seated on a crimson velvet stool, leaning over a polished counter, whose shining surface speedily disappears from view beneath a silken Ossa piled upon a velvet Pelion, while daintily-cravated and stylishly-moustached manikins bow their

pretty bows and smirk their little smirks on the other side of it? If there does, that woman was not Mrs. Reynard, nor was it Miss Barrow; so, when the autocrat informed them of the day in which he wished to leave for Aland, there was a feminine duet improvised upon the spot, in which both voices plaintively deplored the hard fate which compelled them to leave the proximity of temples of fashion "without having bought one earthly thing."

"What! more shopping?" exclaimed the ogre, whose male intellect could not grasp the fact that a woman's shopping is never done.

"More shopping, Dr. Reynard? why, you do not wish us to return to the plantation, where we will be buried for the next six months, without at least supplying ourselves with the *absolute necessities* of life?" And Mrs. Reynard cast a most reproachful look at her derelict spouse.

"Certainly not, my love,—certainly not," said the penitent husband; "but if you and Helen really require another week in which to do your shopping, would you mind my preceding you home? You know you have promised to spend this last week with the Appletons, and it will not be like leaving you at the hotel; and as James is to accompany you home, you will be as well taken care of as if I were to wait for you."

"Is there anything particularly pressing that requires your presence at Aland?" asked Mrs. Reynard, coldly.

"There is, my love," replied her husband, promptly. "I have this morning received a letter from your manager, informing me that some new disease has broken out among the stock, and your mules are dying two and three a day. I think it probable I may be able to check it by going up at once myself; but it is nothing, of course, that need interfere with the plans you and Helen may have already formed."

Dr. Reynard's object in desiring to start home was actually true, but his insisting upon the ladies remain-

ing to pay the visit promised to a much-esteemed friend of Miss Barrow's father, was owing to his desire to satisfy himself that Ralph was as he had left him. For, if he should find him much changed for the better, through the exertions of his artful cousin, it would be easier for him to undo what she might have done, in the absence of the poor boy's mother, than with her there, for, although Mrs. Reynard had never interfered in any plan he had proposed for her son's benefit (?), he knew well that it was her blind confidence in his judgment that had made her so easy a dupe; but even her cold indifference might not be proof against a second attempt to frustrate Bertha's successful efforts to arouse her cousin. Hence it was decidedly best to see and judge of Ralph's condition before the return of his mother. It would, also, thought the arch-schemer, suit his purpose best to make his appearance at Aland unannounced.

As Mrs. Reynard made no further objection to his preceding her home by a few days, he conducted her and Hélène to the house of their friend, bade them as tender a farewell as if 'twas their last meeting in this vale of tears, and took passage alone for Aland.

A day or two previously, Mrs. Reynard had written to Bertha to look for them one week from that writing. That was all the young conspirator had been waiting for. She desired to so time her cousin's departure that there should be no *contretemps* upon the day upon which they should take passage from New Orleans. Ralph should be handed over into Mr. Bolton's charge, to take the first boat he could "hail" in, it being deemed by them safest to avoid the regular packets.

* * * * *

The week, the day, the hour had come for Bertha to take the daring step of sending the heir of Aland away from his mother's house, to go in search of help at Dr. Gardiner's hands.

His trunk was packed—had been carefully packed—by a pair of loving, womanly hands that had forgotten

nothing which could possibly conduce to the comfort of the helpless exile. She had written a long letter to Dr. Gardiner, telling him that the step she was taking was entirely unauthorized by her cousin's guardians, telling him why it had to be so secretly done, begging him if he really desired to benefit her cousin, to keep his presence under his roof a profound secret, inclosing the letter written by Otis Barrow on his death-bed, and requesting Dr. Gardiner that when the unfortunate heir of Aland should be sufficiently restored to attend to business details, to direct him to take that inclosure on to his father's old friend and consult with him *before* returning to Aland. "Of course," added the devoted girl, "any communication with me would endanger my poor cousin's secret; therefore, until he returns to Aland himself, I must be content to bear my burden of anxiety and suspense as best I may. That God may bless the strange step I have been compelled to take, is my most earnest prayer."

Everything was in readiness. Mr. Bolton had been notified the day before of the exact hour on which his charge might be expected, and had returned the laconic answer, "All right,—Jack Bolton's ready."

And as the sun was sinking, Bertha came into the sitting-room, where Miss Chevreul and Ralph were playing at that most stupidly-innocent of all games, dominoes. She had her cousin's hat in her hands, and the little hands that held it were trembling like snowdrops in a storm.

"Cousin, come; I want you to go with me a little while."

Always ready to obey her sweet voice unquestioningly, Ralph pushed the dominoes aside, and rose up with alacrity.

"Bertha," said Miss Chevreul, as the two prepared to leave the room arm-in-arm, "do not stay out long, dear, for the sun is nearly down, and it grows so cold after sunset."

"Do not be uneasy," was Bertha's evasive reply. And they passed out of the room.

"Ah!" murmured Miss Chevreul, as she gathered the discarded dominoes together, and replaced them in their box, "how delighted his family will be to see what a miraculous improvement that sweet girl has wrought in the poor boy!" Then, as she had the prospect of an hour or two of undisturbed quiet before her, she drew a large easy-chair close to the fire and prepared to settle herself comfortably for a long resting spell; but the exertion of moving the heavy chair brought on a violent attack of coughing, and for the space of the next fifteen minutes the sound of her hard, rasping cough fell unnoticed and unpitied on the stillness of the empty house. It subsided after awhile, and, panting and exhausted, the lonely sufferer lay back in her chair, her eyes closed, her breast heaving painfully.

In the mean while it had been but a few moment's work for Bertha to seat herself and her cousin in the skiff that was to convey him and his baggage to Tanglewood, and then, with long, steady strokes, her two skillful oarsmen sent the little boat skimming across the silvery water like a thing of life.

"Where are we going?" asked Ralph, looking brightly animated with the pleasure of the swift motion of the boat.

"You are going to make a little visit to a good friend, Ralphy," said Bertha. "You want to go, don't you?"

"Yes, I want to go. That fellow rows first-rate, doesn't he?" And he pointed to the oarsman sitting next to him.

It was fortunate for the success of Bertha's plan that he was willing to follow her so blindly, else she would have found it difficult work to coax him to accompany her on so slight an explanation.

Bertha was too tremulously excited to converse easily during the transit from Aland to Tanglewood, which, happily, occupied but a little more than ten minutes. As the skiff neared the opposite shore, she

could see that the old family coach—an antiquated affair, which closed up entirely—was already in waiting before the gate.

Mr. Bolton, resplendent in his very best suit of clothes and shiniest hat, stood on the lake-bank waiting to receive his charge.

As the boat grated upon the shore, Bertha turned to Ralph and bade him look and tell her who that gentleman was who was waiting for them.

Ralph raised his dim eyes and looked at the burly figure of honest Jack Bolton, without the faintest token that he recognized in him one of the best and stanchest of his own old-time friends.

“I do not know him,” he replied, in answer to Bertha’s question.

“Oh, Ralphy! don’t you remember good Mr. Bolton? You used to go hunting and fishing with him, when you were quite a little boy.” And the eager anxiety in Bertha’s sweet voice made it sound almost querulous, “for suppose,” she thought, tremblingly, “her cousin should take one of his unreasoning prejudices against Mr. Bolton, and refuse to go with him?” But his answer reassured her anxious heart.

“Mr. Bolton,—Mr. Bolton,—yes, I know him. He broke my bay pony for me,—my pony that I called Jack Bolton.” And a look of knowing satisfaction took the place of the puzzled perplexity with which he had at first regarded the figure standing upon the bank.

“Thank God!” exclaimed Bertha, fervently.

“Halloo, Ralph, my boy!—glad to see you!” was the hearty greeting of Bertha’s strange ally, as he held out a hand to assist the young man from the boat,—“don’t believe you know me, though.”

“Yes I do,” said Ralph, looking very wise,—“you’re Mr. Bolton.”

“Mr. Bolton, am I? you young scamp! A pretty way you’ve treated an old friend!—been home a year, and never been to see him!”

“I’ve been sick,” said the poor boy, apologetically,—

"haven't I, miss?—very sick." And he turned for corroboration of his statement to his cousin, who could hardly restrain the tears that were threatening to overpower her at this, to her, supreme moment.

"How soon can you get off?" she asked of Mr. Bolton, in a low, agitated voice.

"Well, Miss Berthy, I allowed to give Master Ralph some supper before we set out, for you know we take the boat at a mere cotton-landing, and thar's no chance of his hunger being satisfied anywheres between this and the boat's table; so I calculate it will be about an hour longer before we get fairly started."

"Who drives you?" was Bertha's next anxious interrogatory.

"Old Jake, miss; and as he hates the gentleman on the other side of Silver Lake worse than he does the gentleman down below, a mighty safe driver he'll make for our purposes."

Then the time for Bertha to say good-by to the beloved one, for whose sake she was periling so much, had come, and the brave girl, who had plotted and schemed and counterplotted so adroitly and so fearlessly for his dear sake, stood there clinging to the weak arm that could afford her no help,—trembling and weeping in very terror of the possible consequences of her own scheme.

"Mr. Bolton,—good Mr. Bolton,—take good care of him; don't leave him out of your sight until he is safe in Dr. Gardiner's hands; and oh, please, Mr. Bolton, ask that good man to send me one little line by you, telling me whether I have done right or wrong; for now that the thing is about to be put to the test, I feel so frightened, so terror-stricken, supposing I am working harm for dear Ralph in place of good."

Then Jack Bolton turned comforter:

"How can you be workin' harm, Miss Berthy, in sending your cousin to one of the very first doctors in the city?—and you say the French lady over yonder says that of him."

"So she does, and so he is a good doctor," said Bertha, wiping her eyes and brightening up once more.

"And, Miss Berthy," resumed her manager, "as far as my part of the contract goes, please don't you spend no more trouble about it. Jack Bolton is a friend to them that's a friend to him; but he ain't one of your Bible good-folks that turns t'other cheek when one's been slapped, and a gentleman, what shall be nameless, has put many a insult upon Jack Bolton sence the rightful owners of the Tanglewood plantation is been underground; an' ef it hadn't been that I thought, by sticking to the old place, Major Snowe's grandchild and Miss Rebecca's daughter would be the better off, in the long run, than she might otherwise be, Jack Bolton would have give notice and quit some good time back; so you needn't be troublin' yourself about havin' led the lamb, called Jack Bolton, astray, Miss Berthy, for the lamb has cut his eye teeth long before you ever seed the light."

Bertha hardly heard, or hardly comprehended, what the man was saying to her. She had no time to stop and analyze Mr. Bolton's character or motives, she only knew that his devotion to her family had been proven, and she was perfectly willing to trust in him in this emergency. She extracted the letter she had written to Dr. Gardiner from her pocket, and giving it, with the card containing that gentleman's address, into Mr. Bolton's hand, she pressed one trembling kiss upon her cousin's lips, and turning her back upon the two men, she almost ran back to the skiff.

"Where is she going?" asked Ralph of Mr. Bolton, looking after his cousin's rapidly-retreating form with vague sadness in his mournful eyes.

"She'll be back presently," said Mr. Bolton, drawing the young man's arm within his own; "come, let's go up to the house and have a bite of supper."

Ralph followed docilely, and as the little skiff backed out from the shore, Bertha saw through her blinding tears the tall, slight figure of her cousin, and the

heavy, burly form of the manager, disappear through the wicket that led into the yard at Tanglewood.

The two negroes who were officiating as oarsmen were the two trusty boys, Gus and Hiram, whose devotion to Ralph Barrow and Bertha Lombard was only equaled by their unspoken, but unmitigated, hatred of Dr. Reynard. Therefore to insure their silence was no difficult undertaking. A few words, spoken by Bertha on the return trip, was all that was necessary. On the principle that a hint to the wise was sufficient, Miss Lombard purposely spoke vaguely, for it was exceedingly distasteful to her to have to admit two of her aunt's slaves into her confidence in any degree, but Ralph's safety demanded this sacrifice of pride, also, therefore she spoke the necessary precaution,—

"Gus, do you and Hiram love your Mars' Ralphy as much as you pretend to?"

"Try us, missy," was the significant reply from both.

"Well, then, you will answer no questions from any one at all that will injure your master. I will answer all and every question myself, and I am the person I want every one to question."

"Yes, missy," said the two oarsmen, and their shrewd, twinkling black eyes gave indication that they fully comprehended the rôle assigned them. They were to "play stupid," as Hiram murmured, in a low voice, to his fellow-oarsman when Bertha's attention seemed absorbed in contemplating some object on the Aland side of the lake which they were now rapidly approaching. And I defy the whole universe to produce a race of human beings who are such accomplished adepts in the art of "playing stupid" when occasion demands.

As the skiff touched the home-bank, Bertha directed the attention of the negroes to the object which she herself had been so anxiously contemplating for a few moments.

"Whose horse is that, Gus, that Rob is watering?"

Gus turned his head in the direction indicated, and then replied, promptly, "I don' know, missy; he don' belong on dis place."

"Call Rob this way," said Bertha, in a quick, anxious voice.

One stentorian call brought the little black jockey cantering up to the spot where Bertha, who had left the skiff by this time, stood in trembling apprehension of—she knew not what.

"Whose horse is that, Rob?" she demanded of the small urchin, who looked wonderfully like a gorilla, perched upon the large, raw-boned animal's back.

"I don' know, missy," replied Rob, phlegmatically, "less'n mout be Mr. Jones's ole bay mar'; tho' his'n's tale's bobder than this'n's." And Rob, turning sideways in the saddle, cast a contemplative glance backward upon the caudal extremity under discussion.

"Is Mr. Jones in the house?" asked the young girl, breathing a little freer.

"No'm," was Rob's unsatisfying reply.

"Then, who rode his horse here?" asked Bertha, waxing impatient.

"Mars' doctor rid him, missy," said Rob, placidly.

Bertha started violently. "Why didn't you tell me that at first, you stupid boy?" she exclaimed, excitedly.

"'Cause, missy, you never axed me. You axed me whose mar' this'n belonged to." And Rob, presuming his examination concluded, stuck his bare heels into the mare's flanks and galloped away.

"My God! my God!" exclaimed Bertha, aloud, "and Mr. Bolton said it would be one whole hour before they should leave. He will bring him back! he will bring him back! What shall I do? what shall I do?"

"Missy," said Gus, speaking respectfully, but hurriedly, "the fishin's mighty good on t'other side ov the lake, an' ef you kin keep things quiet in-do's for

fifteen minutes more, thar won't be nary boat on this side of Silver Lake for the next four hours."

"This be a fus'-rate night for giggin' fish," cried Hiram, enthusiastically, "an' this nigger's gwine to git his torches ready in a hurry." And shouldering an oar, he started off briskly toward the quarters. Gus took the hint, and, shouldering the other oar, followed in Hiram's wake at an energetic trot, leaving the little skiff useless for all present purposes.

Bertha's soul was filled with the most tumultuous agitation. Dr. Reynard had returned most unexpectedly. Ralph's capture was imminent. On the chance of preventing him from discovering the course she had taken until all possibility of his crossing the lake in pursuit of the poor fugitive, rested her one hope. What should she say to him? How keep that knowledge from him? Her brain was in such a whirl she could not think. Her limbs trembled under her, so that she tottered rather than walked to the house. Everything was dark in the main building; she supposed he had gone direct to Ralph's sitting-room, thither she would follow as soon as she had given herself one moment in which to collect her scattered ideas. She passed on to her own room, and divesting herself of her hat and mantle, she clasped her hands tightly above her head, imploring divine direction and assistance in this the moment of her cousin's extremest peril. Five fatal moments she spent within her own apartment.

CHAPTER XLIII.

UNMASKED.

THIS is what had happened within the house at Aland during the short half-hour of Bertha Lombard's absence :

After the daring girl had come into Miss Chevreul's presence and invited her cousin to go with her, the two had passed out before her, leaving her under the impression that they were gone merely for a short stroll. The lateness of the hour precluded any other conjecture.

Bertha's efforts in her cousin's behalf had been attended with such happy results that Miss Chevreul had gradually discontinued her own surveillance of the young man, the more especially as she had informed his stepfather, by letter, of the existing state of affairs, and had presumed from his silence that he acquiesced in the existing state of things. Moreover, her own rapidly-failing health completely unfitted the unhappy woman for any active exertion ; therefore she was hardly more than a companion to the two young people over whom she had been left as virtual spy and jailer.

She was looking forward eagerly to the return of the family. It would be her release. Poor, broken creature, she, too, had her plans for the future. When are we too old or too feeble to form them ? She would go to the good Sisters of the Good Shepherd and beg them to take her in as one of them. She would spend the residue of her days in serving Him who spake those comfortable words : " Go in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee." If finite love could bring such balm as had Bertha Lombard's to her darkened soul, what

could not infinite love do for her? Soft bright dreams of a happy future, still possible even for her, were floating vaguely through her mind, when the door of the sitting-room where she sat dreaming her day-dreams was rudely burst open, and John Reynard stalked into her presence, putting to flight her peaceful fancies with his harsh voice:

“What in the devil is the matter in this house? Is everybody dead? It is almost night, and I have had to stumble through Egyptian darkness to get to this room; and now that I’m here, I find no one but you. What does it all mean? And where are my stepson and Bertha Lombard?”

Rosine Chevreul had started into a sitting posture as these harsh sounds fell upon her ear, and, as was invariably the case lately, her sudden motion brought on a violent spell of coughing.

The brute who had so startled her stood on the hearth-rug looking down upon her wasted form and sunken features and listened to the cruel cough which he knew better than she betokened galloping consumption, without one grain of pity in his rocky heart; for he was devoured by a savage uneasiness at the absence from her presence of the poor imbecile he had left as her prisoner.

“Stop that cursed coughing, and answer me, can’t you?” What was the use of wearing a mask before *her*—his tool?

The cough stopped of itself presently, and then Rosine, looking up timidly into the harsh face of her interlocutor, replied,—

“I am looking for them every moment, Dr. Reynard; they just went out for a short walk. Bertha never keeps him out late.”

“I’ll be d—d, madame,” said the counterfeit gentleman, purpling with rage, “if your answer does not betoken a very decided degree of good fellowship between Miss Lombard and her cousin!”

“Oh, yes,” said Rosine, innocently, “they are on

the very best of terms. Bertha can do anything she pleases with him."

"The devil she can!" exclaimed Dr. Reynard; "and how long, may I ask, madame, since you relinquished the duties you were paid for performing into Miss Lombard's hands?"

"I never relinquished them, sir; but Bertha insisted upon being with him, and you will be delighted to see what a change she has wrought in him. He is like a new being."

"Hell and fury!" roared the baffled brute, springing wildly to his feet. "Curse you, why did you not send me word of the change in him, as I ordered you to do?"

But the Frenchwoman sat, white and stunned, answering never a word. Was that coarse brute the *gentleman* before whom she had hung her head in abasement! What did his mad fury mean? It looked like the rage of defeat. Did it mean that he was sorry and not glad at the improvement in his stepson? Had he cursed her because she had failed to make a more efficient accomplice? What else could it mean? Ah, Bertha had been as wise as she had been foolish. But, heavens, what an abyss of dark guilt and premeditated crime those few passionate words of the unmasked schemer had opened to view!

"Why do you stare at me with those graveyard eyes," cried the infuriated wretch, "instead of answering my questions? Why did you not write to me, I say? I ordered the *slightest* change, for better or worse, to be reported."

"I did write. I wrote twice," answered the governess, in a slow, reluctant voice, as if she only answered for fear of further violence if she kept silent. Then she rose feebly from her chair, eager to escape from his coarse presence to the refuge of her own chamber.

"You lie, you poor, weak, miserable, white-faced traitress!" And, as she rose from her chair, the dastard, maddened by the sudden and unexpected frustration

of his cherished scheme, caught the fragile form of the terrified woman, and, shaking her savagely a moment, he flung her back into her chair, exclaiming, in a voice thick with passion, "Stay there, curse you, until I find out all I want to know!"

One wild cry of frightened horror from the white lips of the Frenchwoman,—then, with a gurgling gasp, her head fell forward upon her breast, and a bright red stream of her life's blood welled slowly over her pallid lips.

"God, a blood-vessel broken!" And the wretch who had done the deed sprang wildly toward the bell-rope, ringing furiously for assistance.

It was at this moment that Bertha Lombard opened the sitting-room door. Her face was as white and rigid as the face of a marble statue. Her eyes glowed with the light of a great and defiant resolution. She had resolved, while praying for strength to meet this man, to tell him as much of the truth as she dared, and then defy him to do his worst. But, while steeling her nerves to this fearless course, she had tarried, and while she tarried poor Rosine Chevreul's death-warrant had been sealed. The sight that met her gaze as she stood upon the threshold froze her with horror.

Dr. Reynard, his own face white and terrified, was leaning over the body of his victim, which he had lifted from the chair and laid upon a sofa. The blood was still oozing from her lips and dropping slowly down into a hideous pool upon the carpet.

"Wretch! fiend! have you murdered her?" cried Bertha, excitedly, springing toward the sofa. "Is she dead? Speak! What have you done to her? Tell me! My poor friend! poor Rosine! why was I not here to protect you!"

Time enough had been granted John Reynard to readjust his mask. Self-preservation was now his one thought.

"My dear niece," he spoke in as steady a voice as he could command, "calm yourself, I pray. I have

been in the house hardly twenty minutes, and, as I entered this room, I heard what I presume must have been the final articulation of a most agonizing spell of coughing. As I advanced toward Miss Chevreul's arm-chair I was alarmed at the sight of blood oozing from her lips. I presume she has broken a blood-vessel during her coughing spell. We will hope that it is a small one, in which case a few days of perfect quiet will entirely restore her."

"Poor dear! poor dear!" cried Bertha, believing him; and, kneeling down by the side of the unconscious sufferer, she wiped the thick clots of blood tenderly from the white lips, while hot tears of compassionate sorrow fell unheeded on the sunken lids of Rosine's sealed eyes. "All alone, too!" she murmured, pityingly. "Ah, how sad! how sad!"

Assistance had come in answer to the bell, and Dr. Reynard had the body of his victim conveyed into her own room, where he went to work in earnest to restore animation. Bertha begged to be allowed to assist. "You can do no good, Bertha," said the physician, calmly but firmly; "I require more experienced aid than you can offer, and it will only unnerve you to be with her at present. Remain in here, my dear niece, and rest assured that if you can do your friend any good you shall be called."

He insisted on excluding Bertha, for his guilty soul trembled at the strong probability of being denounced as a murderer, if Rosine Chevreul should ever speak again.

Bertha yielded, for she longed for a little fuller opportunity to prepare herself for the trying interview she must inevitably have with her uncle so soon as Miss Chevreul's alarming condition should allow him time to inquire for the missing heir of Aland. She had no reason to doubt the truth of his statement that he had found Rosine in the condition described, and as she seated herself to keep her lonely vigil in the room adjoining Rosine's, she took herself severely to task

for the harsh and uncalled-for accusations she had hurled at him in her first excitement.

"I hate him so that I am afraid I manufacture bad traits for him," she murmured, remorsefully. The little clock on the mantel struck ten before anything came to break the monotony of waiting. Then Dr. Reynard himself came softly out of the sick-room into the sitting-room, his feet incased in noiseless slippers, and his face wearing an expression of grave benevolence and sympathetic kindness. Drawing his chair close up to Bertha's, he uttered a pious ejaculation in a suppressed voice,—

"Thank God, she is much better! The bleeding is stanchd, and her respiration is much improved."

"Has she spoken?" asked Bertha, eagerly. "Did she ask for me?"

"She is conscious, my love, but entirely too much prostrated to speak. At present all she needs is sleep. I have administered an opiate, and left her in good hands."

Bertha drew her breath hard, as one does when making ready for a good fight, and clasping her two little hands tightly together, she awaited his opening question. But it was not a question, it was merely a polite observation,—

"I was so much alarmed, my dear niece, at finding Miss Chevreul in so critical a condition, on my entrance, that I really have had no time even to think of other matters. Your looks tell me that you have preserved your wonted good health during my absence. I hope the cold weather has dealt equally kindly by our dear boy."

"My cousin is wonderfully improved." Bertha's voice was a little nervous at first.

"I presume, from not seeing him, that he still observes his usual early hours for retiring."

"Dr. Reynard," said Bertha, now in full armor, looking him bravely and defiantly in the face, "I am heartily glad that you have come home alone, for

aunt's absence gives me an excellent opportunity to tell you the truth, and then whatever further need there may be for lying and duplicity will rest with yourself."

Dr. Reynard listened to this peroration in silent astonishment.

"I know," she resumed, "that what I am going to tell you will enrage you so against me that I expect to find my aunt's doors closed against me,—that is, if you deem proper to tell her honestly what I have done and what I am about to tell you. You know I was compelled by you to discontinue the efforts to restore my cousin's memory, which were bearing such evident good fruit, and you purposely excluded me, and me alone, from all association with him."

Dr. Reynard's brow was growing black. "I did that which my judgment as a physician dictated as best for my wife's unfortunate son. Your defying my commands is, to say the least of it, bold in the extreme."

"I was presumptuous enough to think from the very first that you erred in judgment [here the faintest little sarcastic emphasis], but that was the worst I thought of you at first. I secretly resolved, however, if the opportunity ever offered, to resume the course which had promised such happy results, and for that purpose refused to accompany the family to New Orleans."

Dr. Reynard seemed intent upon swallowing his moustache.

"As soon as you left, I defied the gentle authority of that poor tool of yours in the other room, and took complete charge of my cousin during the day. I walked with him, played for him, took him riding, and ate all my meals with him and Miss Rosine. I did not do this with her consent. I did it in direct opposition to her repeated protests. She wrote to you about it, but so determined was I to put my theory to the test that I burned her letter instead of mailing it."

"Your candor is only equaled by your presump-

tion," interpolated her listener, sneeringly. "Proceed with your romantic recital."

Bertha's eyes flashed a little, but her voice remained calm and steady. "Ralph was improving steadily, in spite of the tonic you had left in poor Miss Chevreul's hands for him, when, by a God-sent chance, I discovered that your tonic was absinthe, and at the same time was instructed in the baleful nature of absinthe."

White with rage, the baffled schemer had been sitting powerless before the girl who towered so majestically above him in her sublimely-fearless morality. But at the unexpected announcement of the discovery of his absinthe fraud, he was surprised out of his sneering composure, and exclaimed, unguardedly, "Who has been here in my absence?"

"Some one who was both willing and able to give me good and disinterested advice about my poor cousin; some one sent here direct by God. But who he was or where he lives is not a portion of the 'romantic recital' I am going to give you," was the recklessly-defiant answer.

"Let us have some more," was the sneering rejoinder, while a pair of burning, malignant eyes were fastened, glowing with hatred, upon the girl's beautiful face.

"I destroyed that box of tonic," she resumed, calmly, "and Miss Rosine notified you of its destruction. That letter I destroyed also."

"The devil you did! It seems that Mrs. Lombard's perfect daughter is pretty good at shabby tricks herself," said the brute, who would gladly have struck her.

"Mrs. Lombard's daughter has been compelled to fight you with your own weapons," retorted the girl, boldly. "You have measured out deception and lies, and I have meted them unto you again. I deplored the necessity, but bowed to it as a necessity. The frank avowal I am now making is because, as no danger to Ralph can accrue from a full confession, I prefer making it to continuing any longer in the prac-

tice of deception and fraud,—a practice I am totally unfamiliar with.”

“And what heroic step did your exalted conscience dictate next, after having burned my letters and destroyed the medicine left for my stepson?”

“Oh,” replied Bertha, quite simply, “there was really very little left for me to do, for he improved so rapidly that even now he may be pronounced on the fair road to recovery.”

Dr. Reynard controlled himself by a powerful effort. It had been enraging to be defied and interfered with thus by a daring girl, but he smiled at her folly in thinking to overreach him. He congratulated himself that he should see his son before his mother should return, and have an opportunity to undo this girl's bold work. He wanted to be alone to concoct new plans. He rose from his chair.

“I shall wait until the morning, my dear, before congratulating you upon your superior judgment in this case, as I should like to judge for myself as to my stepson's improvement. I am still presumptuous enough to rate my own opinion above yours. You have said some coolly-insulting things to-night, which I suppose I shall have to overlook in consideration of your youth and sex. But let me tell you that, in future, if I should ever leave you behind me, you will remember that the doors of Aland are not to be opened to any traveling quacks. I shall have to see Ralph before knowing whether to scold or thank you.”

Bertha rose to her feet as she answered, very quietly, “Ralph is not here, Dr. Reynard.”

“Not here!” roared John Reynard. “Where is he?”

“Gone on a visit to that traveling quack,” was the cool reply.

“What!”—and his face was livid,—“do you mean to tell me that he is gone,—gone out of this house,—is actually nowhere on these premises?”

“Is actually nowhere on these premises!” repeated the undaunted girl, her eyes flashing with triumph and

with indignation ; "and I know by your uncontrollable excitement," she added, "that he has not gone one moment too soon. I know now that all my very worst suspicions of you were correct. Dr. Reynard, you were purposely keeping my poor cousin in his helpless condition in order to retain his fortune in your own hands. I charge you with it to your face, and you dare not deny it!" And Ralph Barrow's beautiful avenger fixed her flashing brown eyes upon the craven wretch before her, until his guilty eyes quailed before her dauntless gaze.

"Girl!" he exclaimed, goaded to desperation, "are you not afraid to brave me thus? Are you not afraid to avow so boldly what you have done? If I am really the wretch you denounce me for, why do you not tremble for your own weak self?"

"No, I am not afraid," she answered, proudly ; "and shall I tell you why? It is because you are not a daring, reckless scoundrel who would endanger his own precious person to accomplish his ends. I would think better of you if you were. Bad as you are, the world's good opinion is very dear to you, and whom you stab must be stabbed in the dark. At this moment your soul is full enough of black hatred of me to make you murder me, if it could be done with impunity ; but it could not, and, therefore, I am as safe as if I had a host of armed defenders at my back, instead of being almost alone with you in this great empty house."

Dr. Reynard glared at her calmly-scornful face in impotent rage. This was a new order of women to him. He was used to coaxing, or flattering, or cowing, or threatening women into measures. But here was a creature—a slight, girlish thing—whom he could crush physically with one blow, who laughed his fiercest wrath to scorn and treated him with a lofty contempt that goaded him to the maddest fury, while it left him utterly powerless to cope with her.

With a muttered curse he sprang from his chair, and, seizing his hat, he rushed from the house.

He must find out something from the negroes that would put him upon the track of his escaped victim.

Gus was the carriage-driver. She could not have sent her cousin away without Gus knowing it. But neither Gus nor Hiram, the two yard-boys, were to be found. Inquiries at the quarter elicited the fact that they were both absent on a torchlight fishing excursion. No one could give the frenzied man any information that could elucidate matters. The carriage had not been out of the carriage-house since mistiss had left. The horse hadn't been saddled that day. No one knew whether Miss Lombard had been across the lake or not. Universal ignorance prevailed throughout the quarter. The "I don' know, master," was deeply - respectful, but fearfully monotonous, returned as it was in unvarying cadences to his irritated questions. Nothing, nothing was to be gleaned, and, like a wild beast, John Reynard raged up and down the lake-shore shielded by the darkness. Cursing the blind folly that had made him trust such vital interests to the guardianship of a weak woman; cursing the mistake he had made in fearing so little from the proud, brave girl who had so completely outwitted him; cursing the boy who had escaped his clutches; cursing the necessity that had kept him glued to Helen's side; cursing everything and everybody, only pausing long enough, once in awhile in his mad tramp, to send a stentorian call across the dark waters of the sleeping lake, in a vain effort to recall one of the numerous fishing-boats that were gliding backward and forward along the farther bank; the torches held over their prows to illuminate the clear depths of the water, looking, with their elongated reflections, like huge fiery exclamation points, in which the spirits of the night uttered their burning protests against the blasphemous wretch who was making night hideous with man's inhumanity to man.

Baffled at every point, John Reynard returned to the house. He re-entered the sitting-room. Bertha was not there. He tapped upon the door of Rosine's room.

Bertha opened it to him. He passed by her and bent over the sick woman.

"No danger of her talking to-night," he muttered to himself. And without a word to any one, he passed out again, this time proceeding to his own room, where he was soon sleeping a troubled sleep.

CHAPTER XLIV.

BAFFLED BY THE TRUTH.

ALL night long Bertha kept her loving vigil over Rosine Chevreul's sick-bed. The heavy, deathlike slumber into which the suffering woman had fallen from sheer prostration continued unbroken until day-break; then, as Bertha, who had tip-toed softly to the fireplace to replenish the andirons, was seating herself once more in the arm-chair, close under the shaded lamp, where she had been trying to read, in order to keep her heavy lids from closing, her attention was attracted by a heavy sigh from the sick-bed, and, glancing quickly in that direction, she saw a white, attenuated hand held up toward her in a beckoning attitude. First turning the lamp up a little higher, Bertha hastened forward, and, bending over the sufferer, she spoke to her in a tender, gentle voice,—

"You are better, dear Miss Rosine, are you not?"

A loving look of recognition from Rosine Chevreul's dark eyes and a fluttering motion of the thin, white lips was all the answer Bertha received.

"Are you in pain anywhere, dear? Does it hurt you to try to speak?"

Again the pallid lips moved as if forming words, but no sound issued from them. Rosine Chevreul's *voice was gone!*

In anxious alarm Bertha dispatched one of the nurses, who was keeping watch with her, for Dr. Reynard.

He dressed hastily and answered the summons promptly, for he feared to leave Bertha alone with his victim, now that she was awake and might possibly divulge the story of his brutality. When he entered the sick-room, Bertha was sitting upon the side of the bed holding both the little, attenuated hands of the sufferer in her own warm clasp, and talking to her in tender, soothing accents, trying to instill into her fainting heart hopes of a recovery, which she did not herself dare believe possible. As John Reynard made his appearance at her bedside, the dark, mournful eyes which had been fixed upon Bertha Lombard's sweet face with so earnest and loving a gaze were turned upon him with a gaze of such unmistakable horror that Bertha started up in alarm.

"My God! What is the matter with her?—Is she dying?—Is it the death spasm? Oh! why does she look at you so fearfully?"

"Leave the room and send Dora to me!" cried the arch-schemer, peremptorily. Bertha was frightened into prompt obedience, for she believed that her unfortunate friend was passing into her death agony, and she could not stay and witness sufferings which she was utterly powerless to ameliorate.

Rosine Chevreul followed her retreating form with a despairing gaze. Frantically she strove to send some sound over her quivering lips to implore the unconscious girl to come back to her,—to stay by her,—not to leave her alone with the man who had already half murdered her. And as the door closed upon Bertha's form she brought her eyes back to bear upon the man who stood before her, and in their speechless, despairing glance he read her thoughts plainly,—she believed he was going to complete the work begun yesterday,—that the man who had already half murdered her was about to complete her destruction.

But John Reynard had still a hope of making use of this poor broken tool.

"Miss Rosine," he said, stooping over her, and assuming a most penitential aspect, "God alone knows how I have suffered for my mad act of yesterday. I can know no rest by night, no peace by day, until assured of your forgiveness. If you cannot grant me that forgiveness with your lips, will you just write it upon this slip of paper?" And, placing a piece of paper upon the bedside, he securely fastened a lead-pencil between her thin fingers; then he held the trembling hand over the paper, saying, in a voice partly pleading, partly peremptory, "Write."

Slowly and feebly the tremulous fingers traced the words, "Ask God to forgive you as I do,—freely. I am punished for having unwittingly aided you."

"As a token that your forgiveness really is free and full, write me a promise," he continued. "The knowledge that I have caused you such unmerited suffering will of itself haunt me to my dying day, and be your avenger. Promise me that you will not make me an object of loathing to my innocent family by divulging the brutal part I acted yesterday."

"You are safe," wrote the feeble hand. And then, letting the pencil drop from her trembling grasp, she turned her head toward the wall to rid herself of the sight of this abject creature, who plead so piteously with her not to use the little remnant of life left in her shattered body for purposes of finite vengeance. Poor mean reptile!

But John Reynard was not yet done with her. To discover from her who had been at Aland during his absence, and had given Bertha Lombard such efficient aid in outwitting him, was his one hope of gaining a clue to Ralph's present whereabouts.

But here he reaped what he had sowed. If he had not unmasked himself so completely in his blind rage the day before, if he had only counterfeited the gentleman a little while longer, he would have been furnished

with the information which he was now burning to possess himself of. For Bertha Lombard, in pursuance of her generous determination not to implicate Miss Chevreul in any degree, had been compelled to leave the matter of Dr. Gardiner's visitation liable to discovery. She had trusted to chance that so casual an occurrence, and one of such remote date, would not transpire in the interchange of household gossip, and had looked upon this as the weakest point in her whole line of mystification. By showing himself in his true colors to Rosine Chevreul, Dr. Reynard had himself strengthened this point for his girlish adversary, for, whereas yesterday Miss Chevreul would have known no reason why she should not have answered any direct question put to her, to-day she saw everything under the glaring light of truth, and very hideous did John Reynard and his black designs look in that light.

"Rosine!"

She turned her head quickly toward him. Once more reaching her hand out again for the pencil, she wrote, "Why do you not go? I have written your pardon; I have promised your safety; your presence is loathsome. Leave me, and send Bertha back to me."

"One question, my dear mademoiselle, I must beg you to answer me, and then I will promise you not to disturb you with my unwelcome presence any longer. Bertha has seen fit to take a most unwarrantable step during the absence of Mrs. Reynard in allowing her cousin to go on a visit to a perfect stranger to both of us. I presume, from her account and yours, that my stepson is marvelously improved; and, believe me, I only wish to satisfy myself that the person whom he has gone to visit is such a one as his mother could receive in her own house. Bertha tells me that she has kept you in profound ignorance of her plans respecting her cousin. She says that you are at perfect liberty to answer any questions I may see fit to ask you; therefore, you see that you will not be betraying her confidence in replying truthfully to what I am

about to ask you. What stranger has my niece seen fit to receive at Aland during the absence of the family?"

"A benighted stranger, whose carriage broke down in front of the house," she feebly traced upon the paper.

"What was his name?"

But Rosine merely shook her head, for the exertion of writing so much was proving too great for her nerveless hand.

"Do you mean that you do not know his name?" asked John Reynard, bending a look of greedy, searching inquiry upon the speaking eyes of the sick woman.

She reached out her hand again for the pencil, and wrote, in quavering lines, "Go away, and let me die in peace!"

"You mean," he muttered, savagely, "that you will not tell me?"

The look in the dark eyes raised now so fearlessly to his was plainly affirmative of this last conjecture.

"Has that infernal little marplot bewitched you, too, that you will not utter a word to jeopardize her impudent schemes?"

Rosine Chevreul gathered all her waning energies to protest against this rude attack upon her darling. Once more her trembling hand grasped the lead-pencil:

"Bertha Lombard is the noblest woman God ever created. She is as pure as an angel, as fearless as a spirit. I will die before I will write one word that could injure her in any way. If she wishes you to know who has been here, she will tell you herself,—*I will not*. Go, and let me die in peace. I have not one word more to say to you."

"Curse you, then die! and the quicker the better!" And, with a savage oath, he turned and strode out of the room, almost stumbling over old Dora, who had entered unperceived by him, and was standing on the other side of the bed-curtains.

"How is she?" asked Bertha, eagerly, who was waiting in the adjoining room to hear in what that convulsive look of horror had terminated.

"It was nothing," said Dr. Reynard, composing his features and his lie in the short space of half a second. "It was merely a spasmodic contraction of the muscles of her face, which passed off in a second. I administered an opiate, and you had probably better not return to her until it has had time to take effect. Dora is in there with her."

"Very well, then," said Bertha. "We will go in to breakfast; it has been waiting for some little while." And she led the way toward the breakfast-room.

As Dr. Reynard took his seat he discovered upon his plate a letter addressed to him in the well-known calligraphy of the manager at Tanglewood. He opened it and read as follows :

"TO DR. JOHN REYNARD.

"ESTEEMED SIR,—You will discover by the here-within inclosed inclosure that the most pressing call is taking me away from my business at a most unseasonable season. If you can find any reliable man to follow up the plow-hands in my absence, I will be much indebted, and will pay the damage on my return.

"Your most obedient servant,

"JACK BOLTON,

"Sup't of Affairs on the Tanglewood Plantation."

The "inclosure inclosed" within this verbose document was a little crumpled scrap of paper, which contained a few words only, written in a hand which vied with Mr. Bolton's own for amplitude of curves and dashes :

"DEAR BROTHER JACK,—If you want to see poor ole marmer alive once more, come straight home.

"Your loving sister,

"MARTHA."

"What in the——" Dr. Reynard checked himself, and fell to chewing his moustache savagely. He had

intended crossing the lake immediately after breakfast, and trying to extract some information from that quarter; but here was Mr. Bolton gone off to the southern part of Georgia, as he discovered by looking at the name of the town from which Miss Martha Bolton had dispatched her hasty summons. Then it flashed upon him that possibly this was part of the plan to deceive him. He would give Bertha the two notes to read, and then watch her face closely as she read. Surely she was not such a finished deceiver but that her ingenuous face would give some token of complicity in the writing of these notes, if they were really intended as blinds. So he leaned forward and tossed the two notes upon the teatray in front of his niece.

"Your manager has seen fit to leave home, Bertha, at a most unseasonable moment. It is really quite vexatious."

Bertha picked the notes up and read them both through with the most imperturbable countenance, saying, as she laid them down again, "Poor Mr. Bolton! Letter-writing is not much in his line. But you surely do not blame him for going to see his poor old dying mother, do you?"

Baffled again, Dr. Reynard fell to eating his breakfast in moody silence.

The secret of Bertha's imperturbability was this: When old Jake had returned from conveying Mr. Bolton and Ralph Barrow to the landing at which they proposed taking the boat, he brought with him two letters, written by Mr. Bolton in the little post-office at their point of embarkation,—the one to Dr. Reynard, the other to Miss Lombard; and, having been ordered by that gentleman to take them both across the lake and deliver them into Miss Lombard's hands the very first thing in the morning, he had done so, and had given them into Bertha's hands just as she had come out of Miss Chevreul's room, leaving Dr. Reynard closeted with her. Mr. Bolton's letter to herself was as follows:

"MISS BERTHY LOMBARD.

"RESPECTED MISS,—As I reached this point of our destination, I found awaiting for me here a letter, which, though it contains most melancholy information for me, may sarve to act as a blind for them as needs blinds, and I inclose it, to be used as you may see most proper. As I kin get home almost as soon by the way of Mobile from the city, this melancholy news will make no difference in my seeing a young man that we are both much interested in safe into the hands of his friend, who shall be nameless.

"Your most obedient servant, honored miss,

"JACK BOLTON,

"*Sup't of Affairs on the Tanglewood Plantation.*"

So it was Bertha's self who placed the letter of "the Superintendent of Affairs on the Tanglewood Plantation" upon her uncle's plate, after having burned her own communication from her ally.

"Damn it!" thought Dr. Reynard, "I must be on the wrong scent then. She would not send the boy off to Bolton's mother, and then give me such a clue as that letter contains for following him straight up. He has not gone with Bolton,—that's plain; so where in the devil has he gone? She would have to be a more hardened little hypocrite than I take her for, if she could be suddenly confronted with a note from an accomplice and keep that calm a face." So the Bolton-theory was consigned to oblivion.

After breakfast, Dr. Reynard proceeded to examine the two boys, Gus and Hiram. On second thoughts, Bertha, dreading for the two helpless slaves the violent wrath which had fallen harmlessly upon her own bold shoulders, had given them her orders to answer truthfully and fully any questions Dr. Reynard might put to them. "For," she had reasoned, "they know so little, and what they do know will not jeopardize Ralph's safety in any degree; therefore he is welcome to any information he can extract from them." So Dr.

Reynard, ringing his library-bell immediately after the morning meal, seated himself in his office-chair, and, summoning the two negroes into his presence, he prepared to overawe them by the most imposing display of magisterial dignity.

"Gus," he began, addressing the elder of the two boys, "do you know what an oath implies?"

"Yes, master," said Gus, promptly. "It means puttin' cussin' words together."

"It means, sir," said Dr. Reynard, "that you are to swear that you will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

"Yes, mars' doctor, I thought it meaned swarin'."

"Now, then, I wish you two to answer my questions truthfully, and if you fail to do so, by G—d I'll make you both suffer for it!"

"Yes, master," was the dual response.

"Where did your Miss Bertha go yesterday, after dinner?"

"'Cross de lake, master," was the reply, which somewhat surprised Dr. Reynard by its prompt delivery.

"Who was with her?"

"Mars' Ralphy," said Gus, in the most witness-like manner.

"An' his trunk, nigger," interpolated Hiram, who had no notion of playing silent partner in so interesting an examination.

"What did they do when they reached the other side?"

"They got out of the skiff, master," was the brilliant and highly-instructive reply.

"Did you see any horses anywhere about?"

"Yes, sir, I seed a par of them."

"A pair!" exclaimed Dr. Reynard, brightening at the prospect of gaining some scrap of information, however small. "What were the horses there for, do you know?"

"They was thar to haul a carriage, seemed like, master, for dey was harnessed to one," said Hiram,

who was "playing stupid" for his own and Gus's private entertainment.

"A carriage!" exclaimed their examiner, puzzled again. Then he reflected that it was highly improbable that Mr. Bolton should start to see his mother, who lived in Georgia, in a carriage; and as Dr. Reynard was in total ignorance that there was such a thing in existence as a lumbering old family-coach, which had been mouldering in the dusty obscurity of the tumble-down stable at Tanglewood for more years than he had known the place, this piece of information, so far from elucidating matters, only deepened the mystery.

"Did you know the horses, either one of you?"

"No, sir," was the strictly-truthful reply.

"Did you know the carriage?"

"No, sir," again.

"Did you know the driver?"

"Warn't no driver thar, s' long as we was on that side."

"How long were you over there?"

"'Bout fifteen or twenty minutes, master."

"What did your Mars' Ralph do after he got out of the skiff?"

"Don' know, master. After Miss Berthy dun tole him good-by, he jes' turned 'round and walked t'ward the carriage, an' we lef' him walkin'."

"Is that all that either one of you know?"

"Yes, master, 'fore God!" was the solemn reply.

"Did neither of you see a strange gentleman anywhere about?"

"No, master, 'fore God we didn't!" which was also strictly true, for Mr. Bolton did not come under the category of "gentleman" with the negroes, nor was he "strange."

The straightforward, evident truthfulness of the answers given by these two witnesses, from whose examination Dr. Reynard had hoped so much, served the purpose of mystifying him better than the most elaborately-concocted string of falsehoods. "Their replies

were so simple and direct that they could not be the truth," was the sophistical conclusion of the completely-baffled man. Was it probable that Bertha would tell him the truth to a certain point herself, and allow her two tools to do the same, if she really desired to mislead him? No; therefore the whole story about the lake, and the horses, and the carriage was a concocted lie, and he was still utterly at fault as to how Ralph had left Aland.

Dr. Reynard was so unfamiliar with the guise of truth that it had passed from before his perverted vision totally unrecognized. He dismissed the two negroes, and was compelled to acknowledge himself further than ever from having obtained the desired clue.

CHAPTER LXV.

REMASKING.

"MAY I ask what explanation you have concluded to give aunt of my cousin's absence?" asked Bertha Lombard, coldly, of Dr. Reynard, a few days before the return of that lady.

"What explanation *I* propose giving!" exclaimed the gentleman addressed.

"Yes," replied the young girl, coolly; "for if the explanation is left to me, I should tell her something like the truth, and the truth might involve some disagreeable discoveries; and as I know there is nothing you so much dread as a *public* scandal, I feel pretty sure that by the time my aunt shall have arrived you will have invented some plausible story that will be all-satisfactory to so careless a mother."

Dr. Reynard glanced at her in helpless rage: "I'll be cursed, miss, if that is not devilish cool! I am to

invent a fable to protect your nefarious schemes from discovery !”

“Not at all,” was the contemptuous rejoinder,—“to protect your own prior nefarious schemes. Remember, I did not plot, I only counterplotted. For your sake,” she added, “I shall have to be accessory to another lie. I wished to know what you proposed telling her, so that there should be no clashing of our statements.”

“I intend to tell her—d—n it!—that an old school-mate of Ralph’s came up the river with me, and pleaded so hard to have the boy pay him a visit, that I consented, hoping the change might benefit him.”

“Quite neat,” said Miss Lombard, contemptuously. And then she passed out from his presence, and going into the darkened chamber of the lonely Frenchwoman, who was still lying there lingering on the verge of the grave, she laid aside the haughty and proudly scornful demeanor she had worn in the presence of the man whom she had unmasked, and became the tender, gentle, loving-hearted nurse, whose voice was as soft as the cooing of a dove whenever she addressed the bruised reed which John Reynard’s brutal hand had broken.

And the man she had left behind her sat over his study-fire, consumed with black, soul-scorching hatred of this heroic girl, whom he so ardently longed to crush, but could not without creating a scandal (!). Whom he would so dearly have liked to drive from under the roof of Aland with scorn and contumely, but dared not for fear of the world (!). His own preservation was Bertha’s safeguard. To punish her would be to expose himself. Therefore she was safe.

The efforts which he was still industriously but secretly making to discover Ralph’s whereabouts, led, in every instance, to nothing. He had turned his back upon the one true clue which had been placed in his hands, and was vainly seeking for others which did not exist. Truth had come to him, but so unfamiliar was her appearance, that he had laughed her to scorn, and flouted her as a liar. But two things remained

for him to try, and if they failed he would have to succumb to the master machinations of his girlish opponent. The Bolton theory seemed to him now the most improbable of any that had, as yet, suggested themselves to him. To satisfy himself, however, he wrote to the postmaster of the little inland Georgian village from which Miss Martha Bolton's letter purported to have come, and requested him to make inquiries for him relative to one Jack Bolton, to discover if the gentleman was really in that place, and if he had been accompanied thither by any one, or had come alone. A sufficiently handsome reward was offered for the desired information, to stimulate the postmaster to make it as full and satisfactory as possible. No answer could be expected to this communication for a fortnight, so Dr. Reynard was doing that hardest of all things to do,—trying to wait patiently during the most agonizing period of suspense.

His other theory was, that Mr. Paul Winchester, whose possible discovery of Ralph's melancholy condition had frequently haunted the guilty man with a vague dread, had seen fit to come down and pay a visit to his deceased cousin's family, and had presumed on his relationship and the old-time affection subsisting between himself and the boy's dead father, and had taken him home with him. This idea had been strengthened by a guilty flush which suffused Bertha Lombard's face when he had purposely mentioned Mr. Winchester's name, to discover, if possible, whether he might not have been the mysterious guest who had visited Aland, and had proven so powerful a foe to himself and so efficient an ally to Bertha. But Bertha's flush was because of the letter she had found; for she did not like to be made to think of the many little underhand things which, for Ralph's sake, she was still compelled to conceal. She loathed deceit and concealment, and she loathed the man who had compelled her to practice them; but the crimson token of her soul's indignation was presumed by Dr. Rey-

nard to be a signal of alarm at his near approach to the discovery of her precious secret.

The following up of this clue, however, Dr. Reynard was compelled to postpone until he should have received an answer from the postmaster of the Georgia village. How he followed it, and with what success, we shall presently see.

* * * * *

It was near dinner-time, when Bertha, who was sitting by Rosine's bedside, reading by her request from the Bible, heard the carriage draw up in front of the house; heard the smooth, oily voice of Dr. Reynard greeting his wife and daughter home, and then heard them all pass through the intervening hall into the family sitting-room beyond. She purposely avoided going to meet the returned travelers until Dr. Reynard should have had ample time to explain Ralph's absence. When she did go in, it was his hated voice that fell first upon her ear:

"And, ah! my dear Agnes," it said, "I have not yet told you how dangerously ill I found our poor Miss Chevreul on my return. I think it was most fortunate that I arrived just when I did, for otherwise it is most probable her attack would have terminated fatally. Our dear Bertha here has been a real angel of mercy to the unfortunate young woman."

Bertha had in the mean time been exchanging her greetings with her aunt, her cousin, and Mr. James Reynard.

"Dr. Reynard tells me, Bertha," said Mrs. Reynard, after having kindly allowed her niece to kiss her upon the cheek, "that Ralph has improved so much that he has allowed him to accompany a young friend of his home."

"He is very much better," said Bertha; "you will be surprised at the change in him."

"I am certainly very glad to hear it," was the ardent response of Ralph Barrow's tender-hearted mother.

"You are not looking so well, Bertha, as when we

left," said Helen. "You should have gone with us; I am sure you would have enjoyed yourself immensely, and you might have had Mr. Reynard all to yourself. I should not have minded in the least." And she glanced saucily at the young man, whose chance of winning the promised reward for his treachery toward Ralph Barrow had been threatened with total annihilation by Mr. Horace Rockbridge.

"Even our blooming Bertha's roses are not proof against the close atmosphere of a sick-room,"—it was Dr. Reynard who answered for her,—“and we must not allow her to do all the nursing by herself any longer, my dears.” This benevolent address was intended for his wife and stepdaughter jointly.

"I am sure," replied Mrs. Reynard, coldly, "I shall take great pleasure in relieving Bertha, at intervals, during the day. It is very unfortunate that Miss Chevreul should be so ill just at this juncture, for Hélène anticipated making the house quite gay, during the interval that we shall be compelled to remain here, before leaving for the summer."

From which you will perceive that the home which Otis Barrow had fixed up with such fond pride for the penniless Agnes Snowe was used merely as a stopping-place during intervals between the "fashionable seasons" by Mrs. John Reynard.

"Mamma," said Helen, pouting, "do you mean to say that, because Bertha's teacher is sick in the house, I have to give up my company and parties? Indeed, I shall do no such thing. Miss Chevreul's bedroom is remote enough from this part of the house; and so that she is well nursed and well cared for, I do not see that she has any right to ask anything further."

"She will not ask that much very long, Helen," said Bertha, in a sad, grave voice; "so try and be patient for a little while, cousin." And she rose up to go away from these people, with whom she had not one feeling in common, to resume her post by the stranger who lay dying within their inhospitable gates. John

Reynard shivered as the girl's sadly-prophetic voice fell upon his ears, for he knew full well that she spoke truth.

"Is she so ill as all that?" asked Mrs. Reynard of her husband.

"She has but a few days to live,—be kind to her, wife." Then he, too, got up and went out on some pretext, for he winced at being questioned about his victim.

"Mamma," cried Helen, hysterically, "I feel as if we had come into a vault! Bertha as solemn as a graveyard, papa looking like a sexton, and a dying woman in the house! Oh, I shall die, if I have to stay here,—I know I shall!" And the spoiled pet of fortune fell to weeping in the most copious style, completely unnerved by the mere mention of the sorrow and gloom within whose shadow Bertha Lombard was patiently and unselfishly pursuing her way, taking no thought of herself, but tenderly trying to lead a wandering soul home to its God before it was too late.

* * * * *

One more weary week dragged its slow length along. One more week of patient, voiceless suffering, and the spirit of Rosine Chevreul sought a happier sphere.

Poor, weak vessel!—weak to resist, weak to do! Strong only to suffer and to love! May the pure angels on high deal more kindly by thee than did thy fellow-sinners!

CHAPTER XLVI.

MR. BOLTON IN THE WITNESS-BOX.

"RESPECTED SIR,—Your letter of inquiries respecting one Mr. Jack Bolton reached this point in due course of time, and I hasten to give you the information you desire, hoping that you will be equally prompt in remitting the sum offered for the said information.

"Mr. Jack Bolton, sir, arrived at this point nigh on to some two weeks ago. He come intirely alone, and was sent for because his aged mother was laying in a very critercal condition. The old lady breathed her last yesterday, and the buryin' is going on at this present writing. I am informed by my brother's wife's mother, whose sister's son's wife is very intimate with Miss Marthy Bolton, the daughter of the late deceased, and sister of the Mr. Jack Bolton which you wish to hear about, that Mr. Jack Bolton expects to return to Louisiany immediate, and take his sister, who is alone in the world now, poor creature! since her late lamented parent died, to keep house for him. For my part I think this is nothing more than a act which common humanity demands.

"Hoping, respected sir, that you will find my information full enough and satisfactory enough, I remain your obedient servant,

"JEREMIAH DALTON,
"Postmaster of Blankton, Georgia."

This effusive document was placed in Dr. Reynard's hands on one morning, and the next morning he received a visit in person from the returned Mr. Jack Bolton, who came over to report himself to his employer the day after he reached home.

Dr. Reynard's confidence in his own astuteness had been sadly shaken since he had been so cleverly outwitted by a girl; and after he had read Mr. Dalton's agonizingly prolix statement of the private affairs of the Bolton family, he was forced to acknowledge that he could not decide whether it was artlessly or artfully stupid. He had also lost faith in cross-examinations, to a great degree, since he had examined two ignorant negroes at great length and yet with no result. Nevertheless, to cross-examine Mr. Bolton was the one chance left of satisfying himself that he really had nothing whatever to do with Ralph's flight from Aland. To ask Mr. Bolton into his study, to order in a decanter of his second-best whisky, and to press the manager affably to help himself freely, were the preliminary forms which Dr. Reynard considered necessary to his examination of this last, but most important witness in the case of *Lombard vs. Reynard*.

"Your summons home was quite an unexpected one, Mr. Bolton?" began the interlocutor.

"Quite an unexpected one, Dr. Reynard," replied the witness, who belonged to the vexatiously non-committal class.

"Of rather a melancholy nature, as I understood by your note?"

"Rather melancholy, thank you, sir."

"I hope you left your respected mother much better, Mr. Bolton," affably.

"Much better, thank you, sir, seeing as the old lady had a through ticket to Paradise."

"Ah! from which I infer, Mr. Bolton, that your respected mother's illness terminated fatally?"

"I 'spose folks of this world would call it fatal, sir, but seems like when one is mellow with years and with religion, as was my old mother, she's just ripe for heaven, and therefore will be better off thar than here. She went off in a quinsy, sir."

This explanatorily. What with Mr. Bolton's filial prolixity and Mr. Dalton's verbosity, Dr. Reynard was

in a fair way to have an ample stock of information relative to the family affairs of Jack Bolton, Superintendent of Affairs on the Tanglewood Plantation.

"I believe you left the day previous to the one in which I received your note, Mr. Bolton?"

"The day previous, sir; that's correct."

"The same day on which my son left Aland on a visit?"

"Glad to see Mr. Ralph's got better enough to leave home," was the reply to this remark.

"Much better, thank you. You would hardly know him if you should see him."

"Yes, he *is* powerfully altered," was Mr. Bolton's unexpected reply.

"You have seen him lately, then?" said Dr. Reynard, striving in vain to suppress every indication of excitement.

"Yes, sir; me and him went down the river on the same boat."

"What!" exclaimed John Reynard, in a voice of unmitigated astonishment.

"I said," repeated Mr. Bolton, in a stolidly composed voice, "that me and him went down the river on the same boat; is there anything particularly surprising in that, Mr. Reynard?"

"Not at all, not at all, my friend," said John Reynard, who had almost forgotten that his rôle was to acquiesce in his stepson's absence, and show no sign of discomfiture thereat.

"You will not think strangely, my friend, of my asking you a few questions about the gentleman my stepson has left home with; for, of course, in his present condition, he is an object of considerable solicitude to me, and I wish to satisfy myself that he is with proper companions. I think it would have been more judicious of my sweet niece if she had tried to prevail upon her cousin to postpone this visit until my return."

"Perhaps, sir," replied Mr. Bolton, in a peculiar sort

of voice, for Dr. Reynard had paused for a reply, and he had to give him one.

"Mrs. Reynard, in fact, seemed so uneasy when she came home and found Ralph gone, that, in order to pacify her, I had to postdate his departure slightly, and tell her that he left with my consent after my return. You know we have to tell these little white lies once in awhile, Mr. Bolton, to save the dear creatures unnecessary suffering," said the master of Aland, growing confidentially affable toward his niece's manager.

"Yes, sir, I suppose so, sir," replied stolid Jack Bolton, whose rôle was to answer questions only, and not volunteer opinions.

"I believe my son crossed over to your side of Silver Lake to go to the river?"

"Yes, sir, I see him and Miss Berthy come across that way."

"Do you know how he went to the boat, Mr. Bolton?"

"In a carriage and par, Mr. Reynard, I believe."

"Do you know whose carriage it was, Mr. Bolton?"

"I do not, sir."

Which was strictly true, reasoned Mr. Bolton, for in the twenty years he had been on the place that old carriage had been kept locked up as a state affair, and a smaller and lighter vehicle was used by Mrs. Lombard on the rare occasions of her leaving home. So how could he know to which member of the Snowe family that heirloom had descended?

"Was there any one in the carriage with Ralph, Mr. Bolton?"

"No one as I see, sir," said Mr. Bolton, in a straightforward, honest way.

Strictly true again, for Mr. Bolton had not so far forgotten his station in life as to take a seat in the same vehicle with the heir of Aland; so, after having seen Ralph safely established in the old family-chariot, he had closed the door upon him, and, mounting his horse, had followed in the wake of the carriage.

Dr. Reynard was growing sadly puzzled again. The

man's answers were so prompt and straightforward that they compelled confidence. And yet what information was he gaining from them?

"You say you went down with my son on the same boat, Mr. Bolton?"

"The same boat, sir," was the prompt reply.

"Did Ralph seem to be alone on the boat, also, Mr. Bolton?"

"No, sir; he appeared to have a friend with him, as stuck purty close to him all the time, and seemed to take very good care of him, sir."

"Ah," said Dr. Reynard, brightening once more, "that is the gentleman with whom he is staying at present, I presume. Did you hear his name, Mr. Bolton?"

"John Rogers, I believe, was his name, sir," replied Mr. John Rogers Bolton.

"Rogers!—Rogers!" repeated Dr. Reynard, musingly. "I do not think I know the gentleman. A—Mr. Bolton,—a—would it be too much trouble to you to describe this Mr. Rogers personally?"

"Well, sir," replied Mr. Bolton, with charming self-depreciation, "I didn't think much of his looks, sir, though you know he might have been a number one gentleman at heart, Dr. Reynard, for all that."

"Certainly, certainly," acquiesced Dr. Reynard.

"Well, sir, as well as I can recollect, Mr. Ralph's friend was about my size; a great red face, set on top of a most awful thick neck; bushy beard; tolerable decentish pair of eyes, and was dressed like a gentleman, which means he had on a black coat and pants and a slick-looking hat."

There, Jack Bolton, you've drawn a very neat picture of yourself and your Sunday bests, and he's on-complimentary enough not to recognize the picture, was Mr. Bolton's mental addenda.

Dr. Reynard had assumed his musing aspect once more. This graphic description of Mr. John Rogers was not elaborate enough for a make-up, and yet it an-

swered to the description of no one he had ever seen, for it never once occurred to him that any man could give such a nonchalant description of himself.

"I am afraid I am tiring you, my friend; but one more question, if you please. First, however, fill yourself another glass." And the decanter was pushed toward Mr. Bolton.

"Thank you, sir, no more for me. Jack Bolton always knows when he's had enough, sir. But your question,—ask on, sir. I am agreeable to answer as many more as you see fitten to ask me."

"Do you know where Ralph and his friend went when they reached New Orleans?"

"And now, doctor, you're growin' too hard for me. Is it likely that a man which has been sent for to see a old mother die should take much time to find out other folks' business? I'm a roughish man, Dr. Reynard, but I've got a heart in my body for all that, sir."

"Certainly, certainly, Mr. Bolton," was the reply, in a voice of irritation. "I thought you might have heard Ralph mention, casually, where this Mr. Rogers lived."

"No, sir," said Mr. Bolton, with a twinkling eye, "I never heard where Mr. Rogers lived. I know that Mr. Ralph and his friend got into a hack and went drivin' like mad, as all them hacks does, you know, away into that big haystack of a town, and I'd as soon agone to hunt for a needle thar as for him after he once got out of my sight."

Dr. Reynard had come to the end of his questions, and what had he learned?

Nothing,—literally nothing.

Once more was he dazzled and blinded by the bright light of truth.

Was it at all likely that if this man was Bertha's accomplice, he would answer any questions truthfully? Was it at all likely that if Ralph really had gone to New Orleans, and Mr. Bolton had assisted in conveying him

there, that he would have confessed to going down on the same boat with him? No; either Mr. Bolton knew nothing of the boy's destination, and his meeting with him was purely accidental, or else he knew all about it, and, of course, had *not* taken him to New Orleans, else he would not have given any clue by which to find him. In either case, nothing was to be gained by questioning him any further. For, if he was innocent and ignorant of the whole affair, any more questioning on Dr. Reynard's part would look suspicious. Whereas, if he knew all about it, he would merely laugh at the success of his ruse if Dr. Reynard should adopt the New Orleans theory and go there to look for the missing young man. No, whatever else he would do, was Dr. Reynard's mental conclusion, he would *not* waste time by going to New Orleans.

"I suppose, sir," said Mr. Bolton, rising as he spoke, "I've answered about all the questions you've got to ask me, haven't I?"

"Thank you, yes, Mr. Bolton, I believe I will trouble you no further. I am exceedingly obliged to you for the patience you have displayed in answering those that a father's natural anxiety compelled me to ask."

"All right, sir; no trouble. I hope them that I've answered may do you some good," with which significant reply he made his best company-bow and left the study.

Bertha Lombard had heard of his arrival; and, as he closed the library-door behind him, she fluttered out of an opposite one, looking pale and worn with her recent sorrowful watching, but nervously excited as she advanced toward Mr. Bolton. "You have something for me, I know; give it to me, quick!"

A little sealed note was dropped into her extended hand, and she hastily glided back through the door of her chamber, and Mr. Bolton stalked heavily out through the entrance-door. With trembling fingers, Bertha tore off the envelope which concealed from her sight these few words:

"Brave girl! brave girl! You have done right. I promise you shall never regret what you have done. Be patient, and have faith in me and in the good God."

"Ah, I will, I will!" And, overcome with emotion, Bertha bowed her head over this little messenger of Hope, and prayed the good God to increase her faith and to enable her to be very, very patient.

* * * * *

"Agnes, my dear," said Dr. Reynard that night as the family sat grouped around the drawing-room fire, "what has become of the Winchesters?"

Mrs. Reynard looked up in unmitigated astonishment: "Why, what in the world could have set you to thinking of the Winchesters, Dr. Reynard?"

"Well, my dear, the connecting links of a long train of thoughts are sometimes rather hard to discover. Let me think now, if I can state correctly, how I did come to think of your first husband's best friend at this particular juncture. Ah," after a momentary pause, "I was thinking, my dear, that we must make our departure for the summer a little earlier this year than usual, for my dear little stepdaughter is withering in the gloom of this house. It has been so saddened lately."

"Oh, papa!" interrupted Helen, briskly, "you are too good to be always thinking of me. Since Mr. Rockbridge has arrived, I assure you I find Silver Lake quite endurable. He's to be back to-morrow, you know; and when he is in the house, I really forget that poor Mademoiselle Chevreul ever existed," was the frankly heartless acknowledgment.

"Quite natural, my dear,—quite so; but until Mr. Rockbridge is your accepted suitor, my little one, it will be hardly the thing for him to be domesticated here."

"No," said Helen, pouting; "and unless he makes up his mind to make his declaration in full family conclave, I don't see how he can ever become an accepted suitor, for I'm treated just like a baby in this house;

everybody, from you, papa, down to him," pointing contemptuously at Mr. James Reynard, "seems to think it necessary to watch me like so many hawks."

"Mr. Rockbridge shall certainly have his opportunity as soon as he makes known to me, my dear, that he desires one," was the significant reply of Dr. Reynard, which sent the spoiled girl from the room with sparkling eyes and crimson cheeks.

"Poor little one," said her stepfather, tenderly, "I am afraid I have angered her. But to return to the Winchesters. Whatever Helen may say to the contrary, I think there is nothing so injurious for a young and bright nature like hers, as to be immured in a silent and gloomy house. On the other hand, the constant whirl and excitement which is kept up at a watering-place ages a girl most rapidly. Thus, I found myself wishing, my dear, that I had some personal friend living North with whom we could leave Helen for a month or two. Failing to find any among my own friends, I fell to thinking of yours, my dear Agnes, and, of course, that naturally suggested the Winchesters."

"They were great friends of Mr. Barrow's,—not of mine," said Mrs. Reynard, coldly; "but I received several letters after Mr. Barrow's death, making inquiry about the children, and begging me to let them spend a portion of the time with them."

"Exactly," said Dr. Reynard. "By the way, my dear, what sort of a looking man was this Mr. Winchester?"

A soft blush actually mounted into Agnes Reynard's marble cheek as she was thus called upon suddenly and unexpectedly to describe the one only human being she had ever ardently loved, and her answer was simply a confused, "I don't know,—why do you wish to hear, Dr. Reynard?"

"Was he a man about Mr. Bolton's size?" asked Dr. Reynard, by way of assisting her memory.

"Mr. Bolton's size!" exclaimed Agnes, indignantly.

"That great, burly giant! No, he is quite tall, but elegant in shape, and graceful in carriage."

"*Was, my love,—was,*" said Dr. Reynard, "for you know a good many years have passed since you last saw him."

"Yes," said Agnes, actually sighing, "that was a long, long time ago; there's no knowing how he looks now."

"Did he have a very red face and a very thick neck?" asked her husband, quoting from memory once more.

"Time, it is true, may have coarsened his features," said Mrs. Reynard, "but it could hardly have converted a slender neck, that was almost womanish in its whiteness, into a very thick one."

"Would you describe his eyes as decentish?" asked Dr. Reynard, conscientiously going on with Mr. Bolton's description of Mr. John Rogers.

"Decentish!" exclaimed Mrs. Reynard in disgust. "Where could you have found such a word? Mr. Winchester's eyes were the finest feature in his face; they were remarkable eyes; large, intelligent, crystalline——"

"Why, my dear Agnes," interrupted her husband, laughing, "how enthusiastic you grow! Mr. Winchester then is, or rather was, a very handsome man?"

"The very handsomest I ever saw," said Agnes. Then her enthusiasm was all exhausted, and she became once more her own cold, haughty self.

Clearly *not* Mr. John Rogers, thought Dr. Reynard, who had been trying to establish some point of resemblance between Ralph's mysterious friend and Mr. Paul Winchester. But Mrs. Reynard's description of her husband's old friend clearly established the fact that no such resemblance existed.

Nothing more was said that night on the subject of the Winchesters, but this casual mention of the name had stirred up memories which were bitter-sweet to the haughty mistress of Aland.

CHAPTER XLVII.

DR. REYNARD PLAYS HIS LAST CARD.

THE longer Dr. Reynard pondered over the apparently honest recitals of the two boatmen who had aided in the escape of his victim, and Mr. Bolton's coincident statement, the more firmly was he convinced that the whole story was a neat fabrication of his fair adversary's, and was intended to send him to New Orleans on a vain search, in the exactly opposite direction from where Ralph Barrow really was. New Orleans was south. Consequently, Ralph was north. North meant Mr. Winchester. Mr. John Rogers meant nothing. So, to manufacture some plausible excuse for invading Mr. Winchester's domain, was the next point to be gained.

Hope sprang eternal in John Reynard's evil heart. It was possible for him to get Ralph Barrow once more into his clutches, if he could only come in contact with him, before he was completely restored; for, only once let him be seen in one of those mad rages, which could be so easily produced by a scientific practitioner, and Dr. Reynard could get the certificates of any number of medical men that the young man was really mad and must be returned at once to the keeping of his legal guardian. Therefore, to find him, and find him at once, was matter of most vital importance.

No more time must be wasted in trying to extract information from Bertha Lombard, whose profound skill in the black arts of lying and deceiving sent a thrill of horrified astonishment through John Reynard's righteous soul, nor from the three tools whom she had drilled to such a scientific degree of artful honesty.

A conjugal *tête-à-tête* in Mrs. Reynard's dressing-room, on the morning following the conversation related in the last chapter, paved the way for putting the Winchester hypothesis to the test.

"Agnes, my dear, have you noticed how thin and worn your niece is looking lately?" was the truly benevolent leading interrogatory of Bertha's foe.

"She does look horribly thin and sallow," was Mrs. Reynard's indifferent reply. "I suppose she is going to be one of those beauties that shrivel up at the slightest indisposition." And she turned with a complacent air toward her mirror, to continue the arrangement of her hair, casting upon the handsome image reflected therein, a look which said plainly that Mrs. John Reynard could tell you of a beauty who did not shrivel up at the slightest indisposition.

"But, really, my dear, I think Bertha has been allowed to sacrifice herself to others a sufficiently long time, and it is our *duty* to take her away for a change this summer."

"Well," said Mrs. Reynard, snappishly, "I am sure I have not refused to let her go anywheres, have I?" For the idea of taking Becky's beautiful daughter into society, where she was sure to eclipse her own daughter, was exceedingly distasteful to the selfish woman.

"No, Agnes, you have not exactly refused, but you have certainly shown no great anxiety to have her go, and this time we must *insist*. Her life has been a very sad one, poor child! and she has been immured in this one spot so long, that her beauty must needs be of no earthly sort if it could stand the test of such a life much longer."

Angelic creature, how admirably well he knew how to return good for evil!

"She shall go with us this summer. There, now, for mercy's sake, don't say anything more about the girl! One would think I was a perfect ogress." And Mrs. Reynard's white brows were contracted in an angry frown.

"Not at all, my dear love,—not at all. I am sure your niece has been most kindly treated ever since she has been under your roof; but you know the experienced eye of a physician can discover tokens of ill health that are invisible to more casual observers, and our niece really needs the change."

Mrs. Reynard preserved a sulky silence.

"I was about to observe, Agnes, my dear, that I hardly think our quiet little Bertha would be benefited by emerging suddenly from her almost nunlike retirement into the giddy whirl of a watering-place," resumed this insatiable plotter. "If we could only find some quiet, pleasant place for her to spend a month or two at first, and then bring her out in the gay season, she would enjoy it all the more."

"Yes," said Mrs. Reynard, who felt somewhat relieved by this suggestion, "but where shall we find such a place?"

"How about the Winchesters?" suggested her husband, carelessly.

"I know they would be very kind to her," said Mrs. Reynard, "for Mr. Winchester had a very high opinion of poor old Becky, and they are just the kind of people to suit Bertha."

"How, my dear?—what sort of people are they?" asked John Reynard, who had his own private reasons for learning all he could about the Winchesters.

"Oh, goodish sort," replied Mrs. Reynard, contemptuously. "The wife is a Christian, I believe, and their one child, a son, was predestined for the pulpit before he was born. Mr. Winchester said something of the sort in his last letter to Mr. Barrow."

"Well, my dear," said Dr. Reynard, "we will notify our niece at once, then, that we think a visit to the Winchesters would be of great benefit to her,—shall we?"

"I have no objections, I am sure," said Mrs. Reynard. "I don't suppose, though, she has a decent thing to wear."

The next observation Dr. Reynard made was on a totally different subject:

"A—Agnes, my dear,—excuse me for mentioning it,—but I think you had better keep a pretty close surveillance of Helen and this young Rockbridge, until I can find out something a little more to his credit than anything I have yet learned."

"Why," asked Mrs. Reynard, "what have you learned?"

"Nothing much, my dear, though, of course, regarding him in the light of a possible suitor to our dear girl, I have made it my business to inquire of any one I thought likely to know him."

"Well, and what have you heard?" asked Agnes, once more, a little irritably, for handsome Horace Rockbridge, heir-apparent to one of the finest estates on Silver Lake, had found favor in her maternal eyes, and she had fully resolved to further his suit all in her power.

"Well, they do say, my dear, that the young man's habits are so dissolute and his expenditures so enormous that old Mrs. Rockbridge has threatened recently to disinherit him; and they say, moreover, that this very visit he is paying her, and which our little Helen so innocently thinks is in consequence of her presence at Silver Lake, is the result of a very threatening letter the old lady wrote him, and he has come up to pacify her with promises of amendment."

He had said enough, for whatever else Mrs. Reynard might submit to, she would *not* let her only daughter marry a dissolute spendthrift. Her answer was so irate and her promise of surveillance was so promptly given that Dr. Reynard felt sure that Horace Rockbridge must needs be an expert, indeed, to find one moment in which to declare his love and plead his suit.

"I'll watch him," said the lady, in tones of heroic determination. And then she and her husband arose and left her dressing-room, in obedience to the summons of the breakfast-bell.

That morning, after breakfast, Dr. Reynard had an interview with his brother James in the library, whither they both resorted, immediately after the morning meal, to smoke their cigars.

"James," began the elder of the two Reynards, "do you know I begin to think you are the d—est fool, sir, I ever saw?"

"Thanks, John!" replied the other, coolly applying a match to his havana. "What particular sin of omission or commission has earned me that new expression of the exalted estimation in which you are so kind as to hold me?"

"Hold your infernal nonsense, sir!" replied John Reynard, exasperated beyond measure at the puppyish affectation of his brother. "Do you know, sir, that Horace Rockbridge is to be here to-day?"

"So Miss Barrow informed us last night."

"Do you know, sir, that if you fail to marry my stepdaughter, you will have nothing but your own beggarly salary and your own beggarly brains to support you for the rest of your life?"

"Yes, I know it," retorted the younger man, growing savage in his turn; "but how in the devil can I make the girl say 'Yes,' instead of 'No?'"

"Have you ever asked her, in so many words, to marry you?"

"Only about forty dozen times," replied the patient suitor, sarcastically.

"How did you seem to stand with her before this puppy Rockbridge came along?"

"Middling fair," was the commercial rejoinder.

"Well, sir, your one chance at present is to make her believe some lie on Rockbridge that will make her offish with him until I can send her up on a visit to these Winchesters. From what her mother tells me of the family, she'll be only too glad to jump into your arms after she's spent a month or two with them," he continued.

"Why, what's the matter with the Winchesters?"

asked Mr. Reynard, crossing his feet over the seat of a chair in front of him.

"Goodish people, it seems; all members of the church; mother a Christian, son studying for the ministry, etc."

"By George!" exclaimed James the little, "that's the place for her. I may find it tough pulling against that handsome dog Rockbridge, but I bet Jim Reynard can hold his own against the best white cravat going. Send her on, John, and domesticate her one month with young Blackcoat, and I'll promise you shall see her Mrs. James Reynard before the year is out."

But Dr. Reynard was gazing contemplatively in the fire, and did not answer this burst of eloquence in words. Suddenly he drew out his memorandum-book, tore a leaf out of it, and, writing something rapidly upon it with a lead-pencil, he handed it over to his brother, with the inquiry, "Can you write in a finikin, womanish style?"

"Try me," said James, as he held out his hand for the slip of paper, and perused its contents with a look of amusement twinkling in his little black eyes.

"I suppose you have on hand a supply of gilt-edge, sweet-smelling paper, haven't you?—fashionable puppies generally do have," added Dr. Reynard.

"Reams of it," answered the fashionable puppy, amiably.

"Well, copy that to look like a woman's writing, and manage some way that she shall think Rockbridge dropped it."

"You're a trump, John!" cried Mr. Reynard, admiringly. And pocketing the piece of paper, he left the room to practice that running French hand to which the gentler sex is so partial.

Mr. Rockbridge came that day, and, according to her promise, Mrs. Reynard stationed herself in the parlor to prevent any interchange of tender passages between the two young people. The young man was certainly very agreeable, and as he chatted gayly and

wittily with first herself and then Helen, she found herself heartily wishing that the whispered rumors against his character might all turn out to be false, for she had seen no young man whom she would be so well pleased to have for a son-in-law.

Now Horace Rockbridge had come to Aland that day with the full determination to ask Helen's hand in marriage. He knew her only by what she had shown to the world. He saw in her a bright, piquant, charming little creature, and he was genuinely and ardently in love with her. He wanted to marry her. He wanted to take her down to his stately old mother and give her this sunbeam to cheer her in her old age. He had come then that very day to ask for his little wife; and as he saw no reason to be ashamed of what he was about, why should he not say what he came for right there, in presence of the young girl's mother? Having come to this conclusion, the frank, open-hearted youth gave one preliminary little cough of nervous hesitation, and then spoke out right bravely, while a bright-red flush suffused his handsome face: "Mrs. Reynard," he said, "I have come here to-day to ask you for your most precious possession." He began in lover-like exaltation of the value of the possession he craved, you see.

"What is that, Mr. Rockbridge?" answered the lady, feigning ignorance of his meaning.

"Why, I think Miss Barrow and I understand each other's feelings pretty well by this time. She knows that I love her, and I hope that she loves me——" Here he paused and cast a look of questioning tenderness toward Helen's averted face. She turned and answered him by a bright little glance of acquiescence. "And so," he resumed, "I want your consent to our marriage." And then Horace Rockbridge's laconic but honest wooing was accomplished.

Mrs. Reynard was charmed into cordiality by this frank deference to herself, in the first place, and then he looked so bright and handsome and manly, that it

was impossible, in his presence, to believe the slanderous whispers afloat against him. Nevertheless a little caution, mingled with kindness, could do no harm, so she answered the young man with dignified reserve:

"You must not think, my dear Mr. Rockbridge, that I do not fully appreciate the compliment you have just paid my little Helen if I answer you rather guardedly, and you must try to make allowances for a mother's natural anxiety for her only daughter's happiness. All that I know of you personally, certainly inclines me to say 'Yes' to your suit; but that knowledge is so very limited, my dear Mr. Rockbridge, that I am sure you will pardon a mother for wishing to inform herself thoroughly as to the morals and private character of the man into whose hands she is about to intrust what you yourself call 'her most precious possession.'"

Horace Rockbridge was so conscious of a clean record, and was so confident that any and every inquiry Mrs. Reynard could make must redound to his credit, that his countenance did not even change at the prospect of her instituting a search into his private character.

"If that is all, dear lady, that causes you to hesitate, I feel sure that before very long I may claim from you this much-coveted little treasure." And, raising Helen's small, jeweled hand to his mouth, he impressed a fervent kiss upon it.

But Helen impulsively held up her mouth to his bearded lips, and murmuring, softly, "Ah, Horace dear, I do love you!" she kissed him before Mrs. Reynard could say one word to prevent.

"Hélène!" she exclaimed, growing rigidly severe, "I have not sanctioned any engagement between you and Mr. Rockbridge yet, you will please remember."

"Ah, yes, you have, mamma!" said Helen, blushing brightly, but glancing at her stately mother saucily; "for you said that if you found that his private char-

acter was as unexceptionable as his public one you would make no objection, and I *know*," she added, with fond faith, "that you will never, never find out anything against my Horace!"

Horace Rockbridge thanked her for this tribute with a tender pressure of the little hand he still held imprisoned, and then, after a few words of earnest thanks to Mrs. Reynard for the conditional assent she had given his suit, he went away confident of the future and buoyant with hope.

As soon as he had left the house, Helen ran, girl-like, to shut herself up in her own chamber, and go over in memory every word, every look, every smile, that had gone toward making that morning the very happiest one of her whole life.

Mr. Rockbridge had been gone hardly more than fifteen minutes, when Susanne entered her young mistress's room holding in her hand a small envelope, which she silently extended toward Helen.

"What is this?" asked Helen, wonderingly, as she glanced down on the rose-tinted envelope and saw that it was addressed to Mr. Horace Rockbridge, in a fine, delicate handwriting, that must certainly have belonged to a woman.

"It is a letter, is it not, mademoiselle?" said Susanne, who had now been with Miss Barrow just long enough to have learned to speak English correctly and to hate, with real French fervor, the tyrannical little dame whom it was so impossible for any one who knew her intimately to love; and the voice in which she said, "Is it not, mademoiselle?" was in sad and sulky contrast to the cheerful alacrity which had formerly distinguished the French maid's manners.

"Yes, it is a letter," replied Miss Barrow, tartly; "but it belongs to Mr. Rockbridge, and how came it in your possession, I wish to know?"

"I suppose mademoiselle's lover dropped it as he was mounting his horse," replied the French girl, "as I picked it up beneath the rack where the horse had stood."

"You may go," said her mistress, curtly. And Susanne left the apartment to inform Mr. Reynard that she had done his bidding faithfully, and pocketed the reward of her treachery in the shape of a ten-dollar bill.

"Had I loved her, he could not have bought me," said the French girl, as she stole away with a guilty feeling quite new to her simple heart.

Helen Barrow sat gazing at the rose-tinted envelope for a moment or two with a feeling of anguished jealousy growing at her heart. The letter had been opened by tearing across the edge of the envelope. Should she read it or keep it and give it back to him when he paid his next visit?

Bertha Lombard would have laid it away and waited for her lover to explain things to her. Helen Barrow preferred setting her doubts at rest herself, without waiting for the more honorable course; so she slipped the inclosure out of the open envelope, and was properly punished for her want of faith.

It purported to have been written by some love-lorn damsel in the city of New Orleans, and, to account for the absence of a postmark, I presume, the idea was ingeniously conveyed that secrecy had demanded its being sent as an inclosure in some one else's letter:

"MY OWN HORACE,—Are you never coming back to me? If you stay away much longer, I shall believe what C. says of you. He says that your pretended visit to your aunt is all a blind,—that you have, in reality, gone to visit that rich Miss Barrow.

"But I will not believe him, Horace dear, until you give me better cause to doubt your love than I have yet had. I laugh in C.'s hateful face, and tell him I am fortunate in having heard you express your real opinion of that affected little monkey, and he will have to invent some more plausible story to make me doubt my future husband. I am not afraid of your little pug-nosed coquette, Horace mine, but I am afraid that you will never be able to get your aunt to forgive that

last slip. Try hard, dearest, to make the old lady believe that you are going to be a model boy after this. Vow and declare and swear, by all the gods and goddesses, that you will never touch another card or drink another drop, and make haste and patch things up, for I am getting desperately tired of waiting, and will marry C. pretty soon just to spite you.

“Your

LUCY.”

Horror, astonishment, and disgust were written legibly upon Helen's bright face as she concluded the perusal of this artfully-contrived fraud.

“The low creature! She is fast! Disgusting!” Then she threw the paper passionately into the fire, and, locking her door, she flung herself upon her bed, and shed the first tears that had wetted her cheeks since she had broken her last doll.

Fortunately for the Messrs. Reynard in this juncture, it never once occurred to Helen to demand an explanation of Mr. Rockbridge. No; she had been insulted,—outrageously insulted,—and she would *never!* never! never see his hateful, deceitful face again!

Which determination she carried so heroically into execution that, after having called three times, and been denied admittance without any excuse whatever to palliate the denial, Mr. Rockbridge's pride took fire and he turned his back upon Aland and its capricious little mistress, vowing that the time should come when he would know what it all meant, and feeling confident that when it did come, Helen would be the one to sue for pardon and not himself.

* * * * *

Within another month the house at Aland was closed up for the summer, the whole family having gone North.

Mrs. Reynard had written to Mrs. Winchester, asking permission to pay her a visit, and hinting at her desire to leave her daughter and niece with her for a short while, and had received by return of mail such a sweet, cordially-expressed invitation for the two young

girls that Bertha's sad heart went out to her instinctively.

“Ah, I know I shall love her,” she murmured, gently, as she handed the letter which had been given her for perusal back to her aunt.

“Ah, I know I shall *never, never* love anything again,” sighed Helen, sentimentally, “for everybody in this world is full of black deceit.”

Bertha smiled in sad amusement at this lugubrious decision, coming from a young lady whose severest misfortune in life, so far, was a lover's quarrel.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

“THOSE WINCHESTERS.”

THE home, which my readers will recollect had been bequeathed to the Winchesters, along with the rest of the worldly possessions of the lonely old woman whom Paul had rescued from death by fire, had been converted, by Mrs. Paul Winchester's fairy fingers, into one of the most attractive suburban residences that ever adorned the outskirts of a town.

The grounds around it, which had been sadly neglected during the period which Mrs. Crouch had spent in lodgings, had long since been restored to their pristine glory.

The handsome old stone-fronted mansion, large enough, as Mr. Winchester often declared, to lodge a regiment of infantry comfortably, had been restored to more than its original elegance, in preparation for the majority of Mr. Charlie Winchester,—an event now gone by little more than two years,—on which occasion Mrs. Winchester had given an entertainment on

the most magnificent scale, "Because, Paul dear," she had said, "you know we have but one boy, and he will never come of age again; so we cannot make too much of the proud occasion." And Paul had laughed at the flimsy excuse the fond mother had invented for bidding all her little world come and do homage to her handsome boy, but had made no objection, for whatever Jeannie proposed was generally found unobjectionable by both husband and son.

"It is your money, little woman; do as you please with it," was generally the off-hand reply of Mr. Winchester, when Mrs. Winchester suggested any expenditure, or proposed any improvement about the premises.

And then she would say, "Ours, dear Paul; I cannot bear that 'mine' and 'yours' between husband and wife. Besides, dearest, it was you who saved the poor old lady's life, and I never have understood your perversity in settling everything on Charlie and me, and going back to your musty old law books."

"I found, wife, that I was intended for work, and not for play. I found reaping what another had sown exceedingly demoralizing. It was meet and proper that your really filial devotion to a lonely old woman should be rewarded, but it was not meet and proper that I should eat the bread of idleness all the days of my life because my wife had accidentally come into an inheritance; and I have been perfectly happy, Mrs. Winchester, since I returned to the musty old law books, of which you speak so disrespectfully," would our old friend Paul reply.

The Charlie of whom Mrs. Winchester was so justly proud was absent from home when Mrs. Reynard's unexpected letter arrived, attending to some law business for his father in a different State.

For Mr. Charlie Winchester had rebelled stoutly against his mother's avowed predilections for the ministry as his calling, and had begged so earnestly not to be forced into a profession for which he felt himself so entirely unfitted, that gentle Mrs. Winchester had

yielded with a sigh, and the young man was, at the time of which we are writing, one of the most promising of the newly-licensed lawyers at the bar of his native town.

He had grown up to be remarkably handsome, having combined his father's noble presence with his mother's almost perfect features. In short, it was the universal verdict of the young ladies of H. that “Charlie Winchester was the handsomest creature they ever *had* seen.” Fortunately for the son of our old friend Paul, he had so well balanced a head upon his handsome shoulders that feminine adulation had so far failed to make him in the least degree vain or conceited. He was simply a bright, handsome, manly young fellow; with plenty of good hard American sense; with a warm heart and a quick temper; equally ready to resent an insult or forgive an injury,—a boy with a host of friends of his own sex,—his father's secret pride and his mother's open boast.

Such was the young “black-coat” from whose presence Mr. James Reynard pictured to himself his perverse Helen flying for relief into his own outstretched arms.

On the evening upon which the Reynard party was expected to arrive, the Winchester mansion was cheerfully lighted up, and Mrs. Winchester was fluttering around in a state of almost girlish excitement; for she had long wished to see the children of her husband's dearest friend, and had frequently lamented her own utter powerlessness to thaw Mrs. Reynard into friendship.

“Is she very awe-inspiring, Paul?” asked the little lady, as she fluttered from window to window of her handsome drawing-room, festooning the rich curtains afresh.

“Desperately so,” replied Mr. Winchester, dryly, as he recalled to memory Agnes Snowe's chilling hauteur.

“And, wife, let me make one request of you?”

“A thousand, husband, if you can think of so many

before they get here." And Mrs. Winchester came and stood near him, turning her pretty head first upon one side and then upon the other, the better to view her artistic arrangement of the damask draperies.

"You know, wife, you are the least little bit in the world given to undue boasting over our boy Charlie," said Paul.

"Certainly I am," replied Mrs. Winchester, proudly; "and Charlie is a boy that *no* mother could help boasting of."

"I think we are both agreed," answered Mr. Winchester, with a smile, "on the subject of Mr. Charlie Winchester's perfections; but what I was going to say, Jeannie dear, was this,—you know Mrs. Reynard has been most sadly afflicted in her son. I have been informed that he drank himself into a state of imbecility before he returned from Europe, and that he has never been himself since."

"Poor Mrs. Reynard," said Jeannie, with ready sympathy, "how she must have suffered! Her only son, too!"

"It is terrible," responded Paul, gravely; "so you see, wife, how exceedingly painful it would be to hear your proud praises of our dear boy, while she, poor woman, has to blush at the mention of her only son's name."

"True, dear Paul, it was very thoughtful of you to warn me, for I am afraid I should have run on in my usual foolish style about my boy, and, of course, it would be agony to her."

As Mrs. Winchester concluded her sentence, a loud ring at the door-bell announced the arrival of her expected guests. With easy grace the sweet little woman received her august visitors, and Mr. Winchester noted, with a fond, proud smile, that his true-hearted little wife played the part of hostess impartially to the rich Mrs. Reynard and the poor Miss Lombard, and seemed blissfully unconscious that she was being patronized by the former lady. That night, in three separate bed-

chambers in the Winchester mansion, three separate couples passed comments upon each other individually.

“Oh, Paul, she is desperately stiff! I wonder if she has frozen into a statue since her troubles came upon her. You know misfortune does harden some people.”

“I think, my dear,” replied Mr. Winchester, “that Mrs. Reynard’s stiffness antedates, by some years, the death of her husband or the downfall of her son.”

“What do you think of Helen?”

“I think she is just what they have made her between them all.”

“So do I. But isn’t Miss Lombard an angelic creature? She is perfectly beautiful, and such lovely manners!”

“Lovely,” said Paul, sleepily acquiescent.

“Paul dear, wouldn’t it be delicious if Charlie should fall in love with her? How I could love such a daughter-in-law.”

“My dear, don’t you think—you’re—the least little—bit—in—a hurry?” The last word terminated in something wonderfully like a snore, and Mr. Paul Winchester slept the sleep of the just.

* * * * *

“Mrs. Winchester seems to be quite a nice person,” said Mrs. Reynard, condescendingly, as she prepared to take *off* her hair.

“Yes,—and Winchester seems to be pretty much of a gentleman, too. I wonder where the young parson is?”

“I have no idea,” replied Agnes; “I do not fancy, from the picture of him that was sent to Mr. Barrow, when the boy was eight or nine years old, that he has grown up anything to be proud of, and I suppose they are keeping him in the background.”

“Attending camp-meeting somewhere, I suppose,” said Dr. Reynard, contemptuously.

“Dr. Reynard,” resumed his wife, “one day will be sufficiently long for you and me to stay here. We can

leave the girls, but I should die if I had to stay one day longer than to-morrow."

"Certainly, my dear Agnes, I am only awaiting your orders,—am ready to start whenever you say so."

One day, thought Dr. Reynard, will enable me to discover if this man knows anything about Ralph, and after that I, too, shall want to leave.

One day, thought Mrs. Reynard, will be as long as I can possibly stay to witness the happiness of that woman. Oh, how happy she is, and how he does love her!

* * * * *

"Helen!" cried Bertha, enthusiastically, "did you ever see two people to whom your heart went out so directly and so entirely as it does to Mr. and Mrs. Winchester?"

"Bertha," said the heart-broken victim of Mr. Rockbridge's supposed perfidy, "how often will I have to tell you that my heart will never again go out to any one,—that it is broken, Bertha,—broken?"

"Nonsense!" said matter-of-fact Bertha. "If you had loved Mr. Rockbridge sufficiently to break your heart about him, you never would have discarded him without at least allowing him an opportunity to explain himself."

"Explain! how could he explain away that atrocious letter? How explain away that odious fast creature's calling me a pug-nosed coquette,—how could he?"

But Bertha was growing weary of the often-repeated outcries against Mr. Rockbridge. She did not believe the letter to have been his property, had said as much to Helen, and it was extremely vexatious, when she tried to broach a fresher and much more interesting subject, to have Helen fall back upon her own imaginary ills.

So, as Helen wouldn't talk about that "lovely Mrs. Winchester" and "that noble-looking Mr. Winchester," Bertha grew contrary too, and would not talk about anything; and I am ashamed to have to acknowledge that Miss Barrow's final melodramatic "how could

he?” was nipped in the bud by a most undisguised yawn from Miss Lombard’s pretty mouth, which had the effect of converting her cousin’s tragic declamation against the perfidious Horace into a most school-girlish display of spiteful vexation.

“I declare, Bertha, you are the most perfectly heartless girl I ever saw in my life. You have shown me not one spark of sympathy in this the most trying ordeal a woman can be called upon to pass through. You laugh at my sorrows instead of feeling for them; you—I declare!—you—why, Bertha!—the mean thing!—she is sound asleep.”

* * * * *

The next morning, after breakfast, Mr. Winchester invited Dr. Reynard into his office, where the two prepared to smoke the cigars which seem to be so absolutely essential to the proper digestion of a man’s food. For a little while, their conversation ran on general topics, then Mr. Winchester purposely and openly brought it around to Ralph Barrow.

“Dr. Reynard,” he said, “I would like exceedingly to hear from you something about my poor cousin’s son. Of course it is a subject which must be exceedingly painful to Mrs. Reynard, and therefore I have been compelled to obtain from chance sources all that I have ever heard about him. Is it really true that he drank himself into a state of imbecility before he returned from Europe?”

“Too true, sir,” said John Reynard, gravely,—“too sadly true.”

“And do you, as a physician, consider his case a hopeless one?”

“I did, sir, at one time,” replied Ralph’s stepfather, fixing his keen black eyes searchingly upon the frank, honest face before him, “but recently I have begun to entertain hopes of his recovery.”

“Ah!” said Mr. Winchester, heartily, “I am truly glad,—truly glad to hear you say so! I suppose you are compelled to leave him at Aland during your

absence? I cannot see how my Cousin Agnes could bring herself to leave him alone in the place."

"He is not at Aland at present, Mr. Winchester, and since you have taken such a kind interest in my poor stepson, I feel emboldened to tell you that I am just now a prey to the very keenest anxiety on his account." This with an air of fatherly concern. "You will please to understand, Mr. Winchester, that what I am about to tell you is in the strictest confidence. In order to prevent my dear Agnes from suffering the agonies of suspense, that only a mother's heart can suffer when the fate of her only son is uncertain, I have been compelled to deceive her in every way lately; and, in fact, this intrusion upon your hospitality is only one step of the many I have been compelled to resort to in order to keep her in the dark. Let me tell my story more connectedly, however, and then you will be able to judge for yourself how perplexing my position is. I hope you may also be able to assist me with your advice, for I know of no one to whom I would so gladly turn for assistance as to the dear friend and near relative of the lamented Mr. Barrow."

Mr. Winchester thanked him for his good opinion of him, and then begged him to proceed with his story.

"You have already heard, Mr. Winchester, of the melancholy condition in which my stepson returned from Europe. His condition was such that I was compelled to confine him closely at home, but you will agree with me, Mr. Winchester, that it would have been decidedly cruel to deny my poor Helen the gayeties so dear to her sex and age on account of her brother's melancholy situation; so, during the past winter, when Mrs. Reynard decided to introduce her daughter into society, I was necessarily compelled to leave home, and to leave Ralph behind me. I left him in charge of a most excellent lady, the former governess of my niece, Miss Lombard; for, as he was as docile as a lamb, all he required was some one to see

that his daily wants were properly cared for, and I knew Miss Chevreul's tender heart so well, that I could safely intrust my poor stepson with her. But just one day before my return the boy disappeared from Aland, sir, and up to the present time I have found it utterly impossible to trace him.”

“What!” exclaimed Mr. Winchester, starting forward eagerly in his chair, “disappeared! Was he alone?—how do you know he is not dead?”

“Because,” replied John Reynard, “I have discovered that he was seen on a boat by a person whom I know very well, and was apparently in company with a gentleman, who treated him most kindly; and up to last night, when I arrived at this house, I was mad enough to hope that, during my absence from home, you might have seen fit to pay your old friend's children a visit, and had persuaded the dear boy to return home with you.” This with an air of frank honesty.

Mr. Winchester looked at the crafty scoundrel, who was telling him his distressful tale with so elaborate an assumption of generous confidence, with unmitigated astonishment in his own truth-telling eyes.

“What, sir!” he exclaimed, while an angry frown contracted his handsome brows, “you thought I stole like a thief in the night and kidnapped my young cousin, without the knowledge of any one in the house? Rather a peculiar supposition, Dr. Reynard, upon my soul, sir!”

“Not ‘kidnapped,’ nor ‘stolen,’ nor anything of that sort, my dear sir; but you certainly had a perfect right to visit Aland, and Ralph, being his own master, would certainly have had a right to accept your invitation to visit you in return.”

“I should certainly, sir, not have enticed a half-crazy boy away from his home without at least having the courtesy to leave a line of explanation for his mother.”

“A thousand pardons, my dear Mr. Winchester. I see now how absurd was my supposition; but you must make allowance for the bewildered state of my

brain when I found our poor boy gone, and was even debarred from making open search on account of my anxiety to save my beloved Agnes the tortures of suspense."

"And pray what story have you seen fit to impose upon Mrs. Reynard?" asked Paul Winchester, coldly, for he felt a rapidly-increasing dislike for the wearer of his dead cousin's shoes.

"I have simply told her that the boy has gone on a visit to an old schoolmate. Fortunately, I returned to Aland some six or seven days before Mrs. Reynard and Helen got back, and she is at present under that impression."

"Humph!" exclaimed Paul, "and yet she does not think strangely of never receiving any letters from him. She is easily blinded."

"As for letters," said Dr. Reynard, quickly, "Ralph was always a poor correspondent at the best, which prevents her noticing his silence at present."

"Well, sir," said Paul, in an irrepressible burst of indignation, "you are most fortunate in having a wife who is so careless a mother that any such flimsy fabrication can satisfy her. But, by God, sir! the welfare of Otis Barrow's son is of more importance to me than shielding Mrs. Reynard's imaginary feelings, and I shall take it upon myself, sir, to institute search for my cousin's son immediately, and publicly."

"I assure you, Mr. Winchester, I most cordially thank you for your promised assistance. Make your search as rigid as you please, but let me implore you not to disturb the serenity which my poor wife is at present enjoying. She can assist us in no way in the search; therefore why inflict needless suffering upon her by destroying the harmless deception I have practiced upon her?"

"Possibly you are right there. She may stay in her blissful ignorance, though I have small reason to believe that her heart would break if the very worst should have happened to poor Ralph."

The two men were mutually puzzling each other. Surely, thought John Reynard, the man's indignation and surprise are genuine. It is impossible to look into his clear, truthful eye, or be long in his imposing presence, and believe he could stoop to a lie, especially, as in the present instance, there is no one to fear. Therefore, where in the devil's name has that witch spirited Ralph to?

Evidently, thought Paul Winchester, the story of Ralph's disappearance must be true, for he could hardly tell me so shallow a lie when I could so easily disprove it. But if the boy has disappeared, it is through his agency, and if through his agency, why should he take the trouble to hunt me up and inform me of the whole affair, when, by reason of distance and estrangement, he had not the slightest reason to apprehend my discovering it for myself? There is the knotty point,—why has he sought me out and told me the whole affair, when he must have known that Otis's children would always find a powerful friend in me? He had no means of knowing that the frank avowal of his cousin's successor was made in the desperate hope of entrapping him into some acknowledgment that might lead to an elucidation of the mystery which had by this time grown unfathomable to John Reynard.

“You will now understand, Mr. Winchester,” the arch-schemer went on to say, “how exceedingly necessary it is for me to return South immediately. As I before remarked, up to last night I entertained the wild hope of finding our poor wanderer domesticated with you, and had even drawn a foolish little heart-picture of the happy surprise it would be to his mother; but now, I must prosecute my search in a new direction.” And Dr. Reynard heaved a sigh of melancholy discouragement.

Mr. Winchester replied by some commonplace conventionalities, to the effect that he would be happy to have Dr. Reynard prolong his visit, etc. etc.; but the words were insincere, and they came in a bungling

fashion from Paul's truthful lips. At the close of their conference, John Reynard, with an assumption of honest candor which was Machiavelian in its policy, made a most desperately bold move.

"Mr. Winchester, do you really desire to assist me in discovering the whereabouts of my stepson?"

"I most certainly do, Dr. Reynard," replied Mr. Winchester; "and your question, sir, implies a doubt of my sincerity which I feel compelled to protest against."

"A thousand pardons, my dear sir,—a thousand pardons! To show you how mistaken you are in fancying that I mistrust your sincerity, I am about to give you the most remarkable proof of confidence one man ever gave to another."

"You honor me," said Paul, coldly.

"I have reason to believe that my wife's niece, Miss Lombard, is cognizant of Ralph's whereabouts."

"Then why not ask her where he is?" said Paul, bluntly.

"Exactly," said Dr. Reynard, with a sneering distortion of his upper lip, which was an abortion of a smile. "Miss Lombard is complimentary enough to assign to me the rôle of principal villain in this family tragedy, and without any assigned or assignable cause has chosen to withhold from me the name of a gentleman who spent one night at Aland during my absence from home, and who is, I have every reason to believe, the individual with whom my stepson is now staying."

"Most remarkable!" was Paul's ejaculatory interruption.

"And in this matter, Mr. Winchester, you can do more than I, who have, in some unaccountable way, gained the ill will of my pretty niece-in-law, dare hope to accomplish."

"In what way?" asked Paul.

"By discovering from Bertha who it was that spent a night at Aland during my absence; and also, the place of residence of the mysterious stranger."

"I presume that will be easy enough," said Paul; "a plain question will elicit a plain answer."

"Not quite so easy, my dear Mr. Winchester, as it appears at first sight. A plain question would make manifest to my niece that we are acting in concert, and once let her think that, and if she has reasons of her own to keep this secret, wild horses could not drag it from her."

"What in the devil, then, do you wish me to do?" exclaimed Paul Winchester, angrily, for, with all his lawyer's astuteness, he was not able to follow his crafty leader through the labyrinthine mazes of deceit.

"The only way in which you can really aid me is to make this discovery without seeming to have an object in it, and to forward to me the name and address of this stranger, without letting Bertha know anything of this conference."

This was a bold and a perilous step on John Reynard's part, and he saw the peril clearly; but there was one faint chance that Mr. Winchester might forward him the desired information, without Bertha discovering anything, in which case he could carry into immediate execution his plan of administering to Ralph the nostrum which was to produce temporary madness, and enable him to gain legal possession of his victim once more.

"The rôle that you have assigned me, Dr. Reynard," said Paul, "is so very peculiar a one, and your whole narrative so remarkable, that I must really request time to ponder over it before I express an opinion or commit myself by any promises. If you please, we will return to the ladies." And throwing into the grate the unsmoked cigar he had been holding between his fingers, Mr. Winchester arose and led the way back to the drawing-room.

D—d risky, thought the desperate schemer, as he followed his host from the room; but the game's almost up, anyhow, and that is my one last chance for unearthing the boy.

The next morning, early, Dr. Reynard and his wife left, the two young ladies remaining behind.

"You will let me hear from you, I presume?" Dr. Reynard had said in a low voice on taking leave of his host.

"As soon as I have any information to give you which will benefit my young cousin, you shall certainly hear from me," was the equivocal reply with which he had to content himself.

CHAPTER XLIX.

PENITENT HELEN.

FOUR months had elapsed since Helen Barrow and Bertha Lombard had become inmates of Mrs. Winchester's hospitable house. Four months of placid content and patient hope to Bertha Lombard, for the very morning after John Reynard had played the hazardous game of trying to convert Mr. Winchester from a probable foe into a possible colleague, Bertha had gone to that gentleman in his study, and, telling him sweetly and frankly that she had a long and strange story to tell him, had begun at the moment of her cousin's return from Europe, and had related everything concerning him to her deeply interested auditor,—her own proceedings in his behalf; their cessation by authority of Dr. Reynard; their resumption in the absence of that gentleman; their indorsement by Dr. Gardiner; her cousin's presence under that gentleman's roof; her discovery of the letter which had been written to Mr. Winchester on her uncle's death, and its suppression by some party or parties unknown; and finally, she wound up by an earnest request that Mr. Winchester would write to Dr. Gardiner and learn something more definite than

she had so far been able to learn of her cousin's progress toward recovery.

Mr. Winchester had listened to the young girl's recital with intensest interest, never once interrupting her by unnecessary comments.

She told the story of Ralph's wrongs with glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes, looking all the while sweetly unconscious that she had done anything herself deserving of the slightest comment.

Then Paul had written to Dr. Gardiner, but *not* to Dr. Reynard, and Dr. Gardiner had written back word that Mr. Winchester's young relative was on the fair way to recovering his mind,—was improving daily, physically and mentally, and as soon as Dr. Gardiner considered his mind strengthened enough for him to occupy himself with business concerns, he himself would accompany him to H., for no other purpose, the good old doctor added, than to receive a kiss of thanks from his little brown-eyed heroine Bertha.

So the little brown-eyed heroine Bertha was possessing her soul in peace; thanking God humbly every morning and night for having blessed her efforts in Ralph's behalf, and looking forward with placid content to the time, not far distant, she dared hope, when she should see the Ralph of the olden time,—bright, brave, joyous,—and the specter Ralph—imbecile, melancholy, decrepit—should be remembered only as a hideous dream of the past.

Nor had these four months been uneventful ones to other members of the Winchester household.

Charlie, perverse boy that he was, had insisted upon disappointing his tender-hearted little mother a second time in her most cherished wishes, and had fallen in love with bright, piquant, saucy Helen Barrow, when his mother so ardently longed to fold lovely Bertha Lombard to her maternal heart and call her daughter. But when Charlie declared that beautiful and graceful as Miss Lombard assuredly was, she was "not his style," and when Paul consoled his dear little wife

for her grievous disappointment by telling her that he had good reason to believe that sweet Bertha's heart had already gone entirely from her keeping, and further added an expression of the great happiness it would be to himself to see his son married to his cousin's daughter, Jeannie prepared, as was her wont, to make the very best of things as they were; in pursuance of which plan she set herself to work to penetrate the substratum of coldness and selfishness that had been carefully spread over Helen's naturally warm heart and loving disposition, showing the young girl her glaring faults so lovingly and tenderly that she could not take offense, expressing so much pained surprise at any exhibition of temper or selfishness that the spoiled girl made, that during the progress of the four months Helen had made vast strides toward becoming the bright, attractive little sunbeam she had originally promised to be.

And she and Charlie were actually engaged to be married! and she was so happy that she must run and tell Bertha. Bertha was sitting in her own room, quietly reading; for she was a discreet young lady, who always knew when she was *de trop*, and Charlie had evidently been suffering under such excessive internal excitement, that she knew a proposal must be imminent, so, as Mr. and Mrs. Winchester were out in the garden, superintending some improvements about the grounds, Bertha had left the two young people alone in the cosy library, and had gone to her own room to read. But her reading was brought to an abrupt termination by a diminutive little lady dropping suddenly down on her knees by her side, and laying a flushed cheek upon the book in Miss Lombard's lap. The little lady had begged her to stop reading, because she had "*such* a secret to tell her."

"Well," said Bertha, smiling indulgently, and trying to look very curious about the secret which was no secret at all, "let us hear this secret, cousin mine."

"Oh, Berthe, Charlie and I are engaged! Really engaged, Berthe!"

"You 'little pug-nosed coquette,'" said Bertha, taking the organ in question between her thumb and forefinger, "you do not suppose you are telling me news, do you?"

"News! I should think I was, Berthe, for I've only known it for half an hour myself."

"Poor Mr. Rockbridge!" said Bertha, in tones of mock pity.

"Let him marry his odious Lucy," said Helen, with a pout; "you know, Berthe, I never really did love him, anyhow."

"I know you did not," said Bertha; "no woman is so ready to distrust the man she 'really does love.'"

"No, indeed," answered Helen, looking very wise; "I know all about it now, though, for I do love Charlie, very, very dearly!"

"Then your poor heart is not really 'broken, Berthe,—broken?'" said Bertha, teasingly.

"Ah, cousin, you cannot tease me now, for I am so very, very happy! And, Berthe——" Helen paused, and, clasping her two little hands upon Bertha's lap, she looked up in her cousin's beautiful face with eyes full of generous contrition.

"Well, Helen?"

"I want to beg your pardon, dear, dear Bertha, for all the unkindness, and coldness, and selfishness I've shown toward you since I came home from Europe. I don't think I'm very bad; at least, Bertha,—at least not incurably bad, for many a time when I've been cross-est with you, it was because I felt you were so much better and more lovable than I, and then I would hate myself because I could not be like you, and then that would anger me against you, because you know, Bertha, a body doesn't like to be made to despise one's self; but since I've been in this true home, cousin, and seen every one in it, from Cousin Paul down to my Charlie, so kind, so gentle, and so unselfish, I've gotten to de-

spising myself worse than ever, Bertie dear, and I've tried to convince Charlie that he just pities me and don't love me, because I'm too bad to be loved real hard by anybody, and I tell him I think he made a mistake in asking me to marry him instead of you, but he says he didn't; and so, Bertha dear, I'm going to try to become worthy of Charlie, and if you'll forgive the past, dear, and help me to be just like you, it will be so much easier, for, oh, Bertha! I've been mean and selfish for so long now, that I'm afraid I never will be fit for anything,—do you think I will?" And penitent Helen looked up in her cousin's face with a brightly pleading look.

"Indeed I do, dear cousin," answered Bertha, heartily. "I think you have already canceled a great proportion of your past offenses by your frank avowal and honest contrition."

"Bertha," said Helen, reflectively, "I tell you where I think mamma made a terrible mistake with me."

"Where?" said Bertha, with an amused smile.

"In sending me to Aunt Verzenay. Aunt was very fashionable and very selfish, and yet very much admired, and I, poor simpleton! thought that to be very much admired I, too, must be very selfish and fashionably cold. Any exhibition of feeling, any display of heart, I thought must be disgustingly plebeian, and so indeed it was considered in the Verzenay school; and so, cousin, for the last four or five years I have been rigidly suppressing my heart, have kept it under a sort of fashionable tourniquet, until I verily believe it is no larger than a boy's marble."

"Is?" said Bertha, smiling meaningly.

"Was, then, Bertie, until I came into this heaven of love and peace,—and oh, cousin! what good cause I have to bless the chance which brought me here!"

"You were sent here, Helen mine, to cure you of your fancy for Mr. Rockbridge. I think it is your stepfather's earnest desire that you should marry his brother."

"I think so too, Bertha," said Helen, breaking into a merry laugh. "And if my Charlie had been home when papa was here, I verily believe he would have taken me away with him. Isn't it funny, to think that I should have come way up here to find the one only human being I ever could have loved really and truly?"

Bertha smiled an incredulous smile, for she did not believe that Helen would have remained disconsolate long, even if handsome Charlie Winchester had not come along so opportunely to heal the wounds inflicted by perfidious Horace Rockbridge.

"And, Bertha," began Helen once more, "I will never be perfectly happy until dear Ralph is found, and I've begged his pardon, too, for all my cruel conduct toward him."

"That was your gravest sin, Helen; I cannot say one word in extenuation of it."

Helen's bright eyes filled with tears. "He will forgive me, Bertha, if you ask him. Ask him to forgive me for your sake. But will we ever find him, cousin?" she continued. "Oh, I am so anxious——"

"A gentleman for Miss Lombard in the parlor."

Bertha glanced up quickly and Mr. Paul Winchester stood in the doorway, a smile of peculiar meaning playing around his mouth, while his fine eyes were glistening with a dewy something, which would have been pronounced tears if it had glittered upon a woman's lids instead of a man's.

"It is Ralph!" said Bertha, in a voice almost solemn from emotion; then she put Helen quickly out of the way and glided swiftly from the room. Helen was starting impulsively after her, but Paul put his arm around her waist, and guiding her footsteps toward the family sitting-room instead of the parlor, he said, in a voice husky with emotion,—

"Let their meeting be unwitnessed, little daughter; she is more to him than all the world besides, and she should be, for, under God, he has her and her alone to

thank that he is this day a man in every sense of the word, instead of a poor imbecile wreck."

"So he has! so he has!" murmured Helen. "And he is well, then,—quite well? And he will love precious Bertha so dearly, Cousin Paul; but, oh! how shall I ever meet him?—my brother, my poor brother, whom I treated so cruelly!"

"His heart is so full of love and thanksgiving, little Helen, that resentment and anger can find no room there, even against those who deserve them more fully than does my naughty, misdirected Helen. But come," he added, in a lighter tone, "our dear boy has been accompanied here by the good Samaritan who ministered unto him in the hour of his need, and we must all combine to show our gratitude and do him honor." And Helen was led into the room to meet Dr. Gardiner.

Too genuine to affect a coyness which she did not feel,—too true herself to doubt the truth of him she loved, the being who had been faithful to his childish love through his darkest moments,—Bertha sped gladly forward to meet Ralph.

But could that tall, graceful figure be the bowed, attenuated form of the Ralph Barrow with whom she had parted only four short months ago? Were those flashing gray eyes, that were fixed so earnestly upon her advancing self, the sad, dim ones from which she had tried so vainly to win an answering look of intelligence? Was it really Ralph?

Speechless with emotion, Ralph remained quite still until she stood upon the rug near him; then, opening wide the arms that were no longer trembling, nerveless, useless arms, he uttered two little words,—

"My Bertha!"

With a glad cry the young girl sprang into the outstretched arms, and ere she left them again, the cares that had infested Bertha Lombard's day "had folded their tents like the Arabs, and as silently stolen away."

An hour passed—passed on the swiftly-flying, rosy-

tinted pinions that Time only uses when he would tantalize lovers,—and then Bertha, tender-hearted Bertha, mindful of others even in this the supremest moment of her life, disengaged herself from the fond clasp that held her and said, sweetly,—

“Poor little Helen, she will think me cruelly selfish in monopolizing you so long. You will find them all in the sitting-room. The little thing was talking of you when your name was announced.”

“You are coming with me, my own?—I almost fear to lose sight of you again.” And Ralph Barrow fastened his flashing eyes in passionate adoration upon the beautiful face of his cousin.

“Presently,” said Bertha, “I will follow you. I want to be alone a little while, oh, my beloved! to thank the good God for the ineffable joy of this moment.” And the glance which accompanied her gravely-spoken words was holy in its intense gratitude.

So Ralph passed alone into the sitting-room, where the rest of the family were assembled, vieing with each other in lavishing attentions upon their honored guest, the good physician who had restored Ralph to them.

“My little Helen!” And the young man strode quickly forward with hands outstretched; but Helen put her little hands behind her back, and stepping quickly behind her lover’s chair, she spoke to her brother over Charlie’s curly head:

“Don’t come any nearer, Ralphy, for I want to tell you something before I even touch your hand, and I’m afraid if you come any nearer, brother, I couldn’t keep from throwing my arms around your neck, dear; and maybe, after you’ve heard what I have to say, you never, never will let me hug you, Ralphy, but I will have to say it all the same.”

Here one small hand loosed its resolute hold of the other and stole up to Charlie’s broad shoulder, and then Charlie’s sympathetic hand stole up and laid itself tenderly upon the little fluttering palm, and this gave

penitent Helen new courage, so she went along right bravely:

"You know, brother dear, that ever since I've been a little tiny thing I think everything has been done that could be done to make me think Helen Barrow the most important personage in the world. Aunt Verzenay, mamma, and Papa Reynard all had a hand in making me the hateful, selfish little wretch I am."

Here Charlie turned quickly and gave Miss Barrow an indignant look, as if he felt extremely outraged at the slighting manner in which she chose to speak of Mrs. Charles Winchester elect. Helen tossed him a look of defiance and resumed:

"I don't want to blame them too much, but I do want to prove that it's more education that's the matter with me than real badness of heart."

Here everybody looked as if they did not think education *was* what was the matter with Miss Barrow.

"So when you came home so dis—cr——"

"Mad!" said Ralph, in a clear, sonorous voice,— "do not mince matters, little sister."

"When you came home so m—so unfortunate, brother, I acted the cruelist, most selfish part by you that a sister ever did act. I was cross with you, Ralph, and spiteful and harsh." Here she sought to withdraw the little hand from Charlie's shoulder, as if in acknowledgment of her own unworthiness, but he tightened his clasp of it. "And Bertha was an angel to you all the time, brother, and did what I ought to have done. And the only harsh words I ever heard her speak, Ralph, was when she reproached me for my cruel conduct to you, poor brother, and I wanted to tell you all this before you had kissed me, Ralphy, so you might not be sorry afterwards. And I wanted to tell you before Charlie here,"—both little hands went boldly up now and nestled in Charlie's brown locks,— "so that he should know beforehand what an impostor he has asked to be his wife, and might retract before it was too

late." An arm stole around her waist, which certainly did not look like retraction.

"Enough, little sister,—enough!" And once more Ralph Barrow extended his hands; but still she waved him off:

"Not yet, Ralphy,—not yet. I want to tell you the very most glorious thing that Bertha ever did, and then I will seem so little and mean by contrast, that you will never want to kiss me, brother, nor will anybody else, not even Charlie here."

A furious look of denial from "Charlie here," negatived this.

"Once, during your mad—unfortunateness, Ralphy, you came to the table with your hair looking as if it hadn't been combed for a week; and, hateful me, instead of not noticing you, begged mamma to make you go comb it, and you flew into a fearful rage; and when papa spoke to you, you darted at him with a knife, and mamma and I shrieked and ran out of the room, like the two cowardly women that we were; but Bertha walked straight up to you, and before she could say a word you had cut her a terrible gash on the arm,—and the scar is there yet, brother; and when I spoke about it, she cried, and said when you came to know anything, that wound would hurt you much more than it ever had hurt her, and so I thought I'd have to tell you that part, Ralphy, for I knew she would never let you see that scar if she could help it. And now, brother, my confession is complete, and I ask you, and all of my dear ones in this room, to forgive me, not because I deserve it, but for Bertie's sake."

Once again Ralph opened his arms, and, as he folded his penitent sister in them, he murmured in her ear, "For her dear sake."

And presently Bertha Lombard glided into their midst, and the peace that passeth all understanding lighted up her great brown eyes and irradiated her beautiful features. Passing straight up to Dr.

Gardiner, she held out both hands in voiceless greeting.

Imprisoning both her little hands in one of his own, the physician reverently laid back the fall of lace that covered her left wrist, and baring to sight a great white scar, he bowed his white head and pressed his lips reverentially upon this silent witness to the young girl's heroism.

Then Ralph Barrow, coming forward, knelt gracefully upon one knee and imprinted a fervent kiss upon the scar, and Mr. Winchester, putting his arm around Becky's child, pressed his tribute also upon the scar, and called down Heaven's choicest blessings on her who bore it, and Charlie Winchester's manly lips added their tribute of honor to Bertha Lombard's exalted virtues, and Bertha, turning a tenderly, reproachful look at Helen for having brought all this public adulation upon her, sought refuge in Mrs. Winchester's arms, where she fell to crying for very nervousness.

"And all this comes, miss," said Dr. Gardiner, turning in well-feigned indignation upon Helen, "from your having been impolite enough to request a young man to comb his head, when he preferred leaving it uncombed." And his savage attack had the desired effect in relieving the overwrought feelings of the little party.

"Ah, doctor," said Helen, smiling saucily, "you can scold just as long as you please, sir; Charlie's arm is around me again, and I am the happiest girl in the world,—not even excepting Bertha."

CHAPTER L.

CACOETHES SCRIBENDI.

CACOETHES SCRIBENDI broke out in an epidemic form in the Winchester mansion on the day following the arrival of Dr. Gardiner and Ralph Barrow, in consequence of which the following letters were received in due time by the occupants of the Aland mansion.

We will give Mrs. Reynard's letters precedence :

"DEAR, DEAR MAMMA," wrote Miss Helen Barrow, after the gushing style of young ladies,—“I am brimming over with joyful excitement and unmerited happiness, and I only wish you were right here so I could tell you everything, with my arms around your neck, and give you a kiss between every word, for, oh, mamma! mamma! I am so happy that my heart seems bursting with love for all the world!

“But let me try and tell you everything a little straighter. I declare it's just like a novel, only Berthe is the heroine and I am the villain. How can I ever bless and thank you and papa enough, mamma dear, for bringing me to this paradise, where I have found perfect, perfect happiness!—for I have found Charlie.

“But I'm not telling you things straight, after all. Everything wants to get itself written all at once, and my heart, and my brain, and my ideas, and my words are all in a jumble; but oh! such a delicious jumble, mother dear,—such a very delicious jumble! After all, things ain't a bit like a novel; for if it was, I would have been left in lonely misery until I died for all my badness, and Berthe alone would have been made supremely happy for all her goodness. But God has been very, very good to me, for he has given me

Charlie; and Berthe, and Ralph, and Cousin Paul, and precious Cousin Jennie have all been more than good to me, for they've found room in their generous hearts for me, the most selfish, the meanest little wretch that was ever redeemed by loving kindness.

"Oh, dear me, mamma, there is no earthly use trying to write coherently when one feels so amazingly incoherent! Berthe never loses her head; she will have to tell you things straight; I can't, that is one thing certain.

"Please come right on, dear mamma, for we are all going to be married here where our happiness came to us. That means me (that's Helen Barrow all over, putting herself first of all),—well, then; that means Charlie and Ralph, and Berthe and I. I don't exactly mean that Charlie and Ralph are going to marry each other, and that Berthe and I are going to do likewise, but the names wrote themselves down in that fashion.

"Wasn't it funny that Ralph should come back perfectly restored (and, oh! so handsome and manly-looking!) on the very day that Charlie had asked me to marry him? And I was telling Berthe all about it when Cousin Paul came to the door and said, with oh, such a queer look on his face! 'A gentleman for Miss Lombard.' And Berthe seemed to know, by instinct, who it was, for she put me out of the way, and almost flew to the parlor, and when she came out again, oh, mamma, you would not have known our pale, quiet Berthe in the gloriously-radiant woman that happiness made of her in a few short moments! Her eyes looked like great brown stars (who ever heard of a brown star?); but they *were* starry; and her mouth, that has always had such a sad little look about the corners, was fairly dimpled and quivering with happiness.

"Ralph is wild with love for her, and when they do stand up to get married, nobody will look at poor old Charlie and me,—yes, they will though, too, for if I am a little pug-nosed monkey, Charlie is handsome enough for two.

"So come haste to the wedding, mamma dear, for Berthe declares she will not go to Aland to be married; and Ralph declares she shall do just as she pleases; and Cousin Jennie declares it would break her heart if she could not have all the wedding preparations to attend to; and I declare I would not do anything to give her a moment's pain. So we all declare that you and Papa Reynard must come on here, if you want to see us four made one,—no, made twain.

"Your supremely-ridiculous and wildly-happy daughter,
"HELEN BARROW.

"P.S.—That is the last time I shall ever write the name of 'Helen Barrow.' Isn't that funny?

"N.B.—Best love to Uncle James. H. B."

Mrs. Winchester to Mrs. Reynard:

"MY DEAR AGNES,—You will pardon the familiarity of my address, I feel sure, for the tie which is so soon to cement the relations between our two families is so near and dear a one that I cannot bring myself to address you more formally,—my dear little daughter elect tells me that she has written 'everything to you,' but I am afraid if her style of composition has been as amusingly-erratic as her actions have been for the last forty-eight hours, she has flung her information at you in a rather chaotic fashion. Charlie's letter to you, which you will receive by this mail, will say all that is to be said about himself and Helen; and other letters, which are also in process of writing, will explain our sweet Bertha's feelings most fully. The object of my own letter is merely to beg you to come on immediately, and lend me your hearty co-operation in doing everything that can be done to render the occasion of the double nuptials in our family supremely satisfactory to all concerned. Bertha's objections to being married at Aland are such unanswerable ones, and my own desire to have my boy married where I can assist in making the occasion a joyous one, will seem good

reasons, I hope, why the ceremony should be performed here instead of in Louisiana. Hoping that your answer to this will be given in shape of yourself and baggage, I am your sincere friend,

“J. WINCHESTER.”

Mr. Charlie Winchester to Mrs. Reynard:

“MY DEAR MADAM,—Letters from my mother and my most precious Helen will accompany this, all treating of the one subject nearest our hearts. It is possible, dear madam, that we are all taking your consent to our marriage too much as a thing granted; but knowing the sincere affection subsisting between my father and my little Helen’s father, feeling proudly conscious that the possession of a fortune almost equal to her own will secure me against the imputation of fortune-hunting, and feeling still more proudly conscious that I have been so fortunate as to win her heart’s best love, your refusal seems so unlikely a contingency that, authorized by the hearty approval of her brother, I have ventured to look upon everything as most happily settled. Your presence, my dear mother elect, is all that is still lacking to make the thing perfect. Hoping that that deficiency will very soon be supplied, I remain yours, with affectionate esteem,

“CHARLES REYMOND WINCHESTER.”

Dr. Gardiner to Dr. Reynard:

“DR. REYNARD.

“SIR,—I learn from your niece, Miss Lombard, that your mental anxiety concerning the welfare of your stepson has been extreme. Let me hasten to relieve you on that score, and at the same time explain away a little theatrical mystery, with which Miss Lombard and myself have seen fit to amuse ourselves at your expense, you will say. Probably; but then, my dear sir, somebody must ‘pay the fiddler.’ During your absence in New Orleans the

past winter, the veriest chance—the breaking down of my carriage—threw me upon the hospitalities of Aland. In the course of my one night's stay there, your niece (by the way a most remarkable girl she is, too) discovering, through the governess, that I was a physician of some repute in the city, explained her cousin's case to me, and begged an expression of my professional opinion thereon. It is possible, most respected sir, that professional courtesy would have suggested my refusing an opinion in your absence had not the young lady subjected to my analysis the very peculiar *tonic* you had left in the governess's hands to be administered to your unfortunate stepson. But when, sir, I found that you were administering absinthe to a boy already tottering on the verge of confirmed lunacy, professional courtesy became arrayed against the common instincts of humanity, and I saw fit, *in view of our old acquaintance*, to take the matter into my own hands. For the sake of your family, sir, I deemed it best to do this privately, instead of having recourse to a public examination of the case by a board of physicians. Your stepson has been with me ever since leaving his mother's house, and is now—thanks to God and Bertha Lombard!—as fine a specimen of vigorous manhood and keen intellect as you will find in the United States. Hoping that this letter will relieve your most natural and truly paternal anxiety about Mr. Barrow, I am, sir, “JOHN GARDINER, M.D.”

Mr. Winchester to Dr. Reynard :

“ DR. REYNARD.

“ SIR,—I have neither the time nor the inclination to write more than half a dozen lines to you. Your plan to convert me into a colleague in your hellish machinations against my unfortunate young cousin was neatly concocted, and might possibly have proved successful if, contrary to your expectations, Miss Lombard had not seen fit to make a confidant of me.

Thanks to the open course pursued by her, the trap you had set for my unsuspecting self was laid bare. Congratulate yourself, sir, that your connection with one whom I have so much reason to love and respect secures you against the exposure you so richly deserve.

“P. WINCHESTER.”

Ralph Barrow to his mother :

“MY DEAR MOTHER,—Under God, through my most well-beloved Bertha and the friend she made for me, Dr. Gardiner, of New Orleans, I am once more myself. The past is too hideous for me even to recur to it in writing ; moreover, my heart is too full of thankfulness and supreme happiness at present for so much as the memory of sorrow or wrong. The crowning blessing of my life is about to be given to me. Bertha has promised to be my wife. She says it would mar her happiness to be married at Aland, and, with God’s help, her happiness shall never be marred by act of mine. We are, therefore, to be married here in my cousin’s house. We both earnestly desire your presence on the occasion. Please say to your husband that as soon after my marriage as I can prevail upon my dear Bertha to return South, I shall relieve him of all further business responsibilities.

“Your son, dutifully, “R. BARROW.”

* * * * * * *

When these letters reached Aland, the state of mind into which one, at least, of their recipients was thrown was anything but enviable. All his plotting, planning, sinning, and scheming had come to naught.

Ralph Barrow restored, and soon to come, in his just wrath, and strip him of his borrowed plumes. Helen, sent up there to be cured of a dangerous liking for Horace Rockbridge, to find there, right in the bosom of the family whose Puritanical proclivities had been considered the great safeguard, a husband in the

"young black-coat" who was to have made Mr. James Reynard so perfectly irresistible by sheer force of contrast.

Everything, everything lost! Himself reduced to absolute poverty again. The merest dependent upon his wife's charity; and what was her poor little portion in comparison to the magnificent fortune of the two children which he had been handling,—yes, and—curse the luck!—would have been handling yet, if he had one soul to back him. But treachery and imbecility had balked him at every turn. If Rosine Chevreul had been made of different stuff, that accursed marplot, Bertha Lombard, would not have had it all her own way in his forced absence from Aland. If that incomparable fool, James, had only played his cards better, Helen and her money would have been secured to him, at least. But now that, too, was gone.

Just as he had arrived at this point in his torturing reflections, that "incomparable fool," Mr. James Reynard, opened the library-door and stood in his brother's presence.

"Hello! What's up now? You seem to be on the rampage." For Dr. Reynard was pacing the length of the library in a perfect frenzy of excitement.

"You egregious fool you, read those letters on the table, and be in a hurry, or I shall be tempted to kick you out of the house before you've mastered their contents!" was the courteous rejoinder.

"What in the devil have I done now?" said James the little, stepping toward the table, and looking curiously at the pile of open letters which was thrown in a heap upon its surface. Mrs. Reynard's were there, too. She had sent them to her husband for perusal, she being confined to her bed that morning with some slight indisposition.

"Read, sir!" roared the baffled schemer, without even pausing in his furious walk.

Quickly ensconcing himself behind the table, so that his brother's threat of kicking him out of the house

before he had finished the task might not be carried into execution, at least without warning, Mr. Reynard proceeded to read.

For a few moments nothing but the crackling of the paper, as the younger brother turned over leaves and folded up letters, or an occasional low-muttered oath from the elder, disturbed the silence of the room, which was broken finally by a sigh of exhausted attention on the part of Mr. James Reynard and the exclamation,—

“Euchred, by Jupiter!”

This flippant ejaculation, this airy levity, was more than John Reynard, sore and smarting as he was, could or would stand. It was the last ounce; besides, he was fairly panting for some one on whom to wreak his bottled fury, and who more richly deserving than this imbecile puppy who had assisted so generously at his downfall?

One active bound placed his left hand in possession of a firm hold upon Mr. James Reynard's orange-colored cravat, and with the right, doubled up into a most formidable-looking fist, he proceeded to punish his delinquent brother properly for all sins of omission and commission. Under the former head came his failure to marry the heiress of Aland. Under the latter, which were too numerous to enumerate, came the crowning sin of that superbly-impudent ejaculation which had brought about the castigation.

If the stricture on the orange-colored cravat had not been so extreme as to interfere seriously with articulation, I think Mr. Reynard would have ventured upon a mild protest against such barbarous treatment; but as John was much the stronger man of the two, the poor little worm just wriggled, and gasped, and writhed, until, with one grand final shake, his wrathful brother flung him against the wall, giving him just five minutes' time in which to make preparations for leaving Aland. I think he found three and a half all-sufficient, for at the expiration of that time he passed through the hall at Aland looking very red in the face and very sullen about the mouth.

"I wash my hands of you, sir, forever!" was the sternly-unforgiving adieu of the elder brother.

And we will do the same, reader, taking care to accompany our ablutions with plenty of the soap of oblivion, for, after all, a nice young man who could have married a hundred thousand, and yet didn't from sheer imbecility, had better be forgotten than remembered.

CHAPTER LI.

BETTER THE GOOD WILL THAN THE ILL WILL OF A DOG.

THE wisdom of the old saw that forms the caption to this chapter was destined to be illustrated by Dr. John Reynard, the whilom favorite of Fortune. But so shamefully had he abused her kindness, such an ingrate had he shown himself to be, that Fortune, in a rage, had turned her back upon him, and handed him over to Misfortune, to be punished and scourged according to his deserts.

To drop figures of speech,—after Dr. Reynard had dismissed his brother in the gentlemanly fashion described in the last chapter, his anger having become somewhat cooled during the process of pounding the nice young man, he felt himself sufficiently master of the occasion to smooth his furrowed brow and curve his lips into the insinuating smile which had become almost natural from constant use, and having thus prepared himself facially, he repaired to his wife's bedroom to rejoice with her over the good news the morning's mail had brought them. He found her sitting in an easy-chair, a rather crumpled-looking cashmere robe enveloping her person, her hair drawn simply back from her face, and the whole woman looking the indifferent, listless, coldly-joyless individual which Mrs. John Reynard had really become. For, after all her

wealth, and her grandeur, and her elegance, Agnes Snowe began to doubt if she ever really had been happy; but then she supposed she was getting old: maybe that was what was the matter. Even Helen's brightly-happy letter had not had power to stir the sluggish pulses of her sluggish soul.

What would you? She had been cold, and hard, and selfish, and unnatural in the tenderest years of her youth, the springtime of the soul, when one naturally looks for warmth and softness and unselfishness and affection, and how can one expect it in the autumn of her life when she had spent all her brightest years in crushing nature and cultivating art?

Dr. Reynard entered her presence with a smile of paternal benevolence adorning his face.

"Agnes, my love, this is truly a happy day for us. Good news from all our dear ones. Ralph himself again, our little Helen about to marry a fortune——"

"Helen is doing very well," interrupted Mrs. Reynard, a little petulantly; "but Ralph's conduct really makes me doubt the truth of his being restored to his right mind."

"How so, my dear?"

"Well, I should certainly think, Dr. Reynard, that Ralph, with his person and fortune, might do better than marry Bertha Lombard."

"You forget, my love, her tender care of him during his—a—his illness."

"Yes," said the lady, bitterly, "she played her cards quite neatly."

As there was nothing to be gained by pursuing that point any further, Dr. Reynard let it drop.

"Of course you will go on to attend the nuptials, my dear?" he presently resumed.

"I suppose so," said Mrs. Reynard, indifferently. "I am sure they are entitled to my best thanks for not giving me the trouble of any of the wedding preparations. Mrs. Winchester is welcome to the glory, and the bother, too. I suppose you go, too,—do you not?"

And she glanced up at her husband with a look of simple inquiry, without one particle of desire, or disinclination either, in her cold, gray eyes.

"Hardly possible, my dear wife. We are threatened with unusually high water, and as my stewardship draws to a close so soon, it will be necessary for me to remain here and do all that I can toward urging forward the work on the public levees; for they are anything but secure, and one of the weakest points bears directly upon our river front. I may possibly come on in time to be there on the night of the wedding; but I see they urge your presence during the preparations, which, I doubt not, will last a month or two."

"Well," said Mrs. Reynard, indifferently, "I suppose one might as well be there as here. Every place is stupidly tiresome to me nowadays. I enjoy nothing."

"You are a little unwell, my dear, and really need the change. The sooner you get off the better."

Mrs. Reynard having nothing to urge in objection to this, it was arranged that she should start early in the next week, accompanied only by her maid. As soon as she was fairly off, Dr. Reynard took the preliminary step in a plan which he had formed to secure to himself some few thousand dollars at least out of the hundreds of thousands which Fate was so remorselessly forcing from his hands. That preliminary step was to dismiss from the premises the old and tried overseer, whose presence might seriously interfere with the manœuvres he had in contemplation.

The plantation of Aland and the adjoining one of Beechland made their thousands of bales of cotton yearly. To mark a large proportion of the crop on hand in his own name, to ship it to his own private merchant, and then to doctor the plantation accounts, so as effectually to deceive a young and inexperienced hand at the business as Ralph would be, was a plan of the very simplest sort, and easy enough of execution

after the overseer's dismissal. His wife would be absent for two months,—and if she were at home, his plan would be in no danger from her, for her indifference about affairs had of late settled into absolute apathy. John Reynard thought bitterly of the paltry sum he should thus secure as compared with the colossal fortune he was relinquishing; but it is something, he concluded, and something is at least better than nothing.

A very busy life of it he led for the next few weeks. Privately marking in a cipher unknown to any one the precious bales which were his last hope. Shipping from a point unused by any of the Silver Lake neighborhood, writing letters of instruction to his own private merchants, and all the time playing the part of model stepfather, by riding hither and thither urging on the authorities to the work on the public levees, whose insecure condition endangered the Aland plantation seriously.

It was while on one of these disinterested expeditions that Dr. Reynard succeeded in gaining the ill will of an individual so insignificant in the social scale, that the fact of having secured his enmity did not cause the master of Aland a thought.

It was almost dark, and Dr. Reynard was riding rapidly, for he was still some miles from home, and the muttering of distant thunder betokened a coming storm. The horse which he was riding was not one of the very gentlest, and on turning a sharp curve in the road, a dark object, lying prone upon the levee, caused him such affright that, with one bound, he unseated his rider; after which exploit he stood quivering and snorting, but not offering to run away, for he had by this time discovered that the apparition which had so alarmed him was nothing but a man, after all, and the quadruped looked a little sheepish at having been so easily scared by the biped.

"Begging yu're honor's pardon," said the biped who had caused all this mischief, springing nimbly to his

feet, "an' shure I never intinded to skeer the hoss, at all, at all. Hope theer's no harm done." And holding his ragged hat in his hand, the poor Irish levee-man stood humbly before the unhorsed gentleman bowing his apologies.

"You drunken fool!" was the courteous acceptance of that apology, "no harm done but the breaking of my saddle-girth."

Now Mike had really been sorry for the mishap, but he was not going to be called a drunken fool for what had been the merest accident, so, slapping on the ragged hat which he had been holding in the most apologetic fashion in front of him, he replied, with a spirit of his own,—

"No more drunken fule than yuresel'. Mabbee if you'd worked as hard the day as meesel', you'd not be unweeling to take a wee bit of a nap yuresel'."

"Hold your cursed jaw, and lend a hand to mend this girth!"

"Do it yuresel' for want o' me," replied the Irishman, sullenly turning his back and preparing to walk off.

"You confounded Irish bog-trotter, do you know who you are talking to?" exclaimed Dr. Reynard, in a towering rage.

"Do I know who I'm talking to?" mocked the levee-man, now as furious as his interlocutor. "Shure an' I do. I'm talking to a young man what gat a leeft in the warld by stepping into a ded mon's shoes. An' a bog-trotter, mabbee, yu're right in namin' me; but shure an' the shoes I trotted the bogs in are gude, honist shoes, arned be gude, honest work, an' belong to no ded mon livin'. An' to mak shure that I'm de-screebing the right mon, I'll tell ye a leetle more about yuresel', for Mike Finney's no stranger on the Silver Lake; many's the rod o' ditchin' he's done for him that's gone,—the father of the puir laddie that should be lordin' in the old house at Aland in place of yuresel'."

A volley of oaths from the physician, who was still tugging vainly at his saddle-girth, interrupted the flow of Mike's eloquence.

"An' if its coorsing yu're wantin', Mike Finney is the boy to 'commodate ye; an' he'll give ye two in the game and bate ye at that." And he prepared to give such a specimen of his powers in that line, that Dr. Reynard, feeling himself vanquished in the war of words, raised his riding-whip, and, as he bounded into the saddle, he dealt his wordy adversary a furious blow about the shoulders.

"Now hold your infernal tongue, will you?"

"By the mother of Jasus, ye'll remember this night, some day, Dochter John Reenard! Oh, yu're heart is as black as O'Toole's colt! Shure am I, whin St. Patrick druv the snakes out ov Ireland, he turned one of the pisonest sort into a mon, an' that same was yu're forbear. Ye've struck me, me lad; just bear that in mind, will ye, until Mike Finney sends you his compliments?—which he'll not forget to do, Misther Reenard,—he'll not forget to do!"

"D—n you! what can you do, poor fool?" exclaimed the rider, wrathfully, disengaging his bridle from the hold of the Irishman.

"Wait an' see, Misther Reenard,—wait an' see. Better the gude will than the ill will, if it be only a dog, Misther Dochter Reenard. Ye'll think so yure-sel' before yu're mony years older, yure honor." And, with mock humility, the infuriated levee-man stepped aside for the gentleman to pass on. How, and when, he was brought to "think so himself," is all that remains for me to tell.

CHAPTER LII.

CALLED TO ACCOUNT.

THE spring of 185— was a late one. By which, I presume, is meant that spring is being defrauded of her rights by surly old winter, who lingers late with his biting winds, and bleak rains, and mud and slush, and ten thousand disagreeable accompaniments, and will not go, although he knows he ought to have gone long ago. So spring was late in coming because winter was late in going, and she would not trust her tender, first-born—daisies and hyacinths—to the chance of being slain by some cruel Parthian dart, cast by the dethroned king of winter. So the gentle spring influences bided their time,—and the tiny bulbs, impatient as sixteen-year old beauties for their début, still lay imprisoned in the cold, dark ground, and old winter still blustered and stormed, and hailed, and rained until he had lashed the ever-restless waters of the mighty Mississippi into a state of impatient fury, that sent them rushing and swelling through its mighty basin, with an angry turbulence that betokened mischief to the experienced eyes of the dwellers upon its banks.

“We are to have high water! Look to the levees!” was the cry throughout the lowlands of the Mississippi Valley. Thousands of brawny, sunburnt exiles of Erin toiled unceasingly, strengthening weak places, elevating low ones,—doing everything, in fact, that puny man could do to protect the country against the angry giant.

Dr. Reynard had been fully assured that the levees bearing immediately upon his locality were secure beyond a doubt. He had ridden out to the river day

after day, to hold long and scientific discussions with the overseer of the works, who had finally satisfied him that he need be under no apprehensions whatever. His mercenary soul was a prey to the very keenest anxiety; for, although the dwelling-house at Aland was situated sufficiently far from the river to secure the premises from danger, the stock-yards and barns and gins were so situated that any crevasse within a mile of the Aland property would be attended with serious loss. In case of such crevasse, the lives of many hundred heads of fine cattle, immense flocks of sheep, more than a hundred mules, some fine horses, all would go.

By some process of financiering, with which no one but himself was familiar, the most of this stock bore the private brand of the present master of Aland, and in the doctored accounts which were soon to be submitted to the rightful master of the property, it figured as purchased by Dr. Reynard during the minority of the children. The doctor knew well that his accounts could not stand legal inspection; but he was trusting a good deal to the fact that Ralph would hardly care to proceed to extremities with his mother's husband, and make their family affairs the talk of the neighborhood. Hence his extreme anxiety respecting the safety of these precious beasts. They were his,—his property,—to be converted into his money.

To remove them to a place of undoubted safety would have cost time and money, and, as he was so repeatedly assured that the levee was as sound as mortal means could make it, he was fain to be content.

Mrs. Reynard had returned to Aland alone, the young couples having mapped out a bridal tour which would keep them absent for some months more; and she alone, therefore, was a participant in her husband's keen anxiety relative to the levees.

She had been home hardly a week when the Silver Lake neighborhood was visited with a storm which will be vividly remembered for many a year to come.

It was a wild, wild night,—wonderfully so, considering the time of the year. The rain beat against the closed shutters mercilessly, and the driving wind caught the tall cottonwoods close to the house in such a fierce grip that they groaned and creaked and moaned like living things in mortal agony, making Agnes Reynard's cowardly soul shiver within her.

"Shoot me, if I'm not glad that levee's all right, or it would be all up with the stock-yards this night!" was Dr. Reynard's last coherent utterance, as he settled himself for the night.

And while he slept, Nemesis was busy. Through the mud and rain and darkness and bluster of the night the figure of a man went sturdily trudging onward. He hardly made any attempt to proceed stealthily, for he knew there was barely a possibility of his meeting a living soul abroad such a night. With long, rapid strides he walked onward until he had reached the levee upon which Dr. Reynard was trusting so confidently for the protection of his treasure.

The river had long since overflowed its natural boundaries, and was resting against the levee within a foot or two of its summit. It had already reached the highest water-mark on record, and as there had been no rise during that day, there was every reason to believe the danger over. Outside the levee was a dense growth of young willows and cottonwoods that clothed the banks of the river. The wind was playing mad pranks in this thicket as the solitary wayfarer advanced and mounted to the top of the embankment. The tall, slender saplings bent forward until he could have touched them with his hand; then sprang back with a wild, weird whistle, creaking and lashing their branches against their neighbors in a dismal sort of way; and the general gloom was enhanced by the sullen splash of the muddy waters as they dashed up against the embankment that so far had resisted even their mighty power. If Mike Finney had been an imaginative mortal, who could fancy warnings and

tokens of divine wrath in whistling winds or moaning waves, he would have turned and fled, entirely relinquishing his long-cherished plan of vengeance. But he had been more insulted than it often comes to an Irishman to feel. Curses he could have forgotten, but the stinging cut of a riding-whip was not so easily forgotten or forgiven; and, so far from relenting on this wildly-tempestuous night, he seemed to consider it a decidedly propitious one for his object, and fell to work with the air of a man determined to do what he had come to do very thoroughly. He had a spade swung over his right shoulder, tied to the handle of which was a bulky bundle, well wrapped up in an old waterproof overcoat. Disengaging this bundle from the handle of the spade, he laid it down on the ground close at hand; then he stuck his spade into the fresh earth on the levee, and, resting one foot upon it, he crossed his hands over the handle and gave utterance to the first sentence that had crossed his lips since leaving the camp that night,—

“Let me think awoil.”

He turned his eyes northeastward from the spot upon which he stood, glancing in the direction of the Aland estate. He did not see it, nor would he have done so if it had been the brightest of sunshiny days, instead of the darkest of stormy nights, for a long, narrow skirt of woods intervened between the plantation and the river road. But Mike stood there in the dark, taking his bearings in some occult fashion, intelligible to himself alone; the result of which was that he once more shouldered his spade, and, picking up his bundle, he walked briskly up the levee about a quarter of a mile northward. Then he stopped again, and, seeming satisfied that he was in the right locality this time, he pulled off his coat, and, flinging it down near him, he rolled up the sleeves of his coarse hickory shirt; then, planting his spade firmly in the ground,—right in the center of the embankment,—he exclaimed, with vicious vim,—

“Michael Finney’s compliments to ye, Misther Docther, an’ here’s hoping yu’re sleeping well the night !” Out came the spade, leaving a long, clean cut behind it. Down it went again at right angles with the first incision. Up it came again with a second apostrophe,—

“Noomber two’s for the gude mon that’s gone ! Many an’ many’s the jigger he’s give to Mike Finney in the days bygone !”

A third cut. “Noomber three’s for the puir laddie that canna help hisself !”

A fourth cut. “An’ noomber four’s for the lash ov yu’re riding-whip, Misther Docther !”

Then he lifted the neatly-cut, square sod of earth out of its bed and flung it into the river. Next he undid the manifold wrappings of his bundle, and brought to light a small can of powder, several disjointed pieces of an old tin gutter, and a yard or two of hempen rope. The can of powder he found fitted admirably well into the square hole in the levee ; then, disposing of his tins in close proximity from the mouth of the can down the inside slope of the embankment, he proceeded to saturate the rope with the contents of a bottle which he extracted from his pocket. This done, he inserted one end of the rope in the mouth of the powder-can, and, slipping it through the tin tubes, he allowed the other end to protrude about an inch. Then Mike Finney’s simple engine of destruction was complete ; but before applying his dark lantern to the end of the rope, he turned once more, facing the Aland property, and, raising his fist in the darkness, he shook it fiercely in the direction of the house that sheltered the man who had struck him.

“‘What can you do, ye puir divil ?’ Theer, Misther Docther, I’ve coomed out this most disagreeable of neeghts to show ye what a puir divil of a bog-trotter kin do toward returning the compliments of the day to a gintleman what rides on his hoss and carries a pritty little riding-wip. Ye’ll know the morrow, whin ye git up and find noothing but wather all around ye, that

it wad a bin better to ha' kept the gude will ov the dog, Michael Finney."

After which oration the Irishman repossessed himself of his spade and hat, then he opened the slide to his lantern, and holding the blaze to the end of the rope, he waited only long enough to be sure that it had ignited, when, breaking into a fleet run, he fled toward the camp as if all the furies of hell were at his heels.

The encampment where the temporary huts had been erected for the accommodation of the levee-men was hardly more than half a mile from the spot where Mike Finney had cut the levee. And running as he did, he made such good time that before his two yards of rope had burned to the mouth of his powder-can he had flung himself into the first cabin he came to, and was immediately so very sound asleep that when a cannon-like report startled all his fellow-workmen to their feet, it was with some difficulty that he could be aroused.

"What in the divil's the matter wid ye all?" exclaimed Michael, with an innocent face, sitting up on his bunk, and rubbing his knuckles fiercely into a pair of eyes that had not been closed five minutes.

"The levee's broke, mon!—doon't ye hear the wather howlin' like a wild baist? Up wid ye, the boss will have us on the tramp witheen five meenits."

"Of course it's broke," said Mike, placidly. "What levee, made by human hands, could stand the lashin' the ould river's been givin' it this blessed night?" And he prepared with alacrity to accompany his companions to the tent, where the foreman was issuing orders for an attempt to repair the breach.

In the mean while, Dr. John Reynard was sleeping in blissful unconsciousness that Mr. Michael Finney had selected that night for "squaring accounts."

It still wanted some hours of day, when a frantic knocking on his bedroom door aroused him from this peaceful slumber.

"Master, master? Listen! The levee! Done broke. Yere dat roarin'?"

With a frantic bound Dr. Reynard sprang from his bed, and throwing up the front window, he put his head out to listen. "Hell and fury!" he exclaimed, as the distant roar of the water fell distinctly upon his ears. In a minute he was in his clothes, in another, he was standing on the veranda, white and speechless, paralyzed for a moment by the totally unexpected calamity.

The negro who had come to give the alarm stood silently by, waiting to see what effect his information was to have. Only a moment or two did the ruined man stand irresolute, then, seizing his hat, he sprang down the front steps, bidding the man follow him.

Mrs. Reynard, who had been standing in the window, startled, but motionless, asked him indifferently what he was going to do.

"I am going to try, madam, to save my stock, and, as the water may cover the road before my return, I shall go in the skiff."

There was no time now for connubial urbanity, and that "madam" was the curtest form of address Dr. Reynard had ever used to his lady-wife.

"Certainly," said Mrs. Reynard, coldly; "you are perfectly at liberty to risk your own life if you value it so lightly; I only hope poor Bill won't lose his, for he is a good soul, and a valuable hand."

Those were the last words that Agnes Reynard ever addressed to her second husband. She withdrew to her own room, and presently she heard the splash of oars, as with long, steady strokes Bill Ray sent the little boat skimming over the dark water of the sleeping lake.

"What you gwine do, Mars' John?" asked the oarsman, who was obeying blindly in starting out on this perilous expedition, but felt assured no good could come of it.

"Open the stock-yards and let the cattle swim for

it," was the curt rejoinder. Bill shook his head in a discouraging manner.

"Row, sir!" cried his master, savagely, irritated by the ominous silence the boy maintained; for in the darkness he could not see the shake of the head. "There's no harm done yet, sir, if it's below Big-Bayou; for that will have to fill up before my lots are flooded."

"'Tain't below Big-Bayou, Mars' John."

"How do you know, sir?" roared the white man.

"Look thar, master," said the slave, respectfully, pointing to something dark floating slowly toward them from the very direction they were steering to reach the stock-yards.

"Drift already! A log! Good God!" exclaimed the master, looking at the slowly-advancing object with horror in his eyes. Then his fears for his property seemed roused to a pitch of frenzy.

"Row, old man!—row hard! row fast! Fifty dollars if you get me there before the water is too high!"

Old William bent to his oars with a will and in dumb silence, for he belonged to a phlegmatic race that seldom wastes words in bootless argument. But he knew that if the current had already found its way into Silver Lake, the crevasse must bear very directly upon the Aland stock-yards, and hence their efforts would be in vain. But to argue with the infuriated creature opposite him would have been sheer throwing away of wisdom, so old William rowed on, leaving the folly of the attempt to make itself apparent. Straight ahead of the boat was a small island which cleft the waters of the lake in two. As they neared this island, the oarsman spoke again,—

"Which shute, master?"

"Willow shute," was the brief reply of the determined man, as he grasped his steering bar more firmly, to prevent it being dragged from his hand.

As they entered the shute, the roaring of the water became louder and nearer, and the negro became aware

that a strong, swift current was telling desperately against him. It soon became a slow and painful struggle for the little skiff to make any headway. Every moment the boy expected to receive the order to turn back, for surely now his master was convinced of the hopelessness of the undertaking. But a husky "Row on," was all that issued from the lips of the white man, who was placing his own life and that of the slave in slighting competition with his cows and oxen.

Painfully, slowly they advanced, until they reached a narrow gorge, through which the pent-up waters came hissing, and foaming, and spitting with such spiteful vehemence that all the determined energy of the two men combined could not force the boat through it. Then the negro ceased his efforts and began a beseeching appeal to the man who was making so much of brute life and so little of human:

"Master! Good Mars' John! Turn back, do, please, sar! 'Tain't no use tryin' to git funder. This nigger knows dese waters bettern you do, good Mars' John, an' it's like temptin' of Providence to keep gwine on in de face of them bilin' waters, which do seem like dey was sayin', 'Go back, go back, you're steerin' straight inter de jaws ov death!'"

Dr. Reynard had been silent during this harangue, neither hearing nor heeding it, but listening, as ever, to the evil counselor within his own bosom, to whom he had given heed so long, that its voice had become the law of his life. Step by step that counselor was now leading him onward to destruction and death.

"On," said Avarice, "it will not be death; it may be peril and suffering; but you are a good swimmer, and can save yourself, and what is one human soul in the balance against all you will lose by not going forward?"

"Damnation!" he yelled aloud, "why don't you row? Once through this gorge, and you *know* we can make the yards easily enough."

"Turn back, master," once more said the old negro,

in a voice so solemn that it seemed the voice of prophecy.

"Curse you!" cried his master, turning fiercely upon him, with a baleful light in his shining eyes, "do you suppose I shall stop to weigh your worthless life against my cattle cooped up yonder drowning? Row on, before I brain you where you sit!" He raised the steering oar, as if to carry his threat into instantaneous execution.

Old William gave one more frenzied pull that pushed the boat into the middle of the gorge. The savage current caught it and sent it spinning round and round like a top; then tossed it mockingly back to the mouth of the gorge.

The negro looked at the white man, whose face gleamed coldly relentless in the gray dawn of the coming day. He glanced at the seething waters. He *could* not stem that current. By one long, dexterous sweep of a single oar he brought the bow of the boat close enough to the bank of the pass to enable him to grasp a protruding root; then, with one wild yell,—before Dr. Reynard had in the least comprehended his design,—he sprang ashore and broke into a fleet run. In springing from the skiff his foot gave it a fierce backward impetus that sent it once more spinning round in the eddy, which the experienced oarsman had found it so impossible to pass.

Abandoned to his own resources, the desperate man, left alone in the skiff, now entered upon a trial of strength and skill with the boiling water. Again and again did the strong, swift current send his little craft spinning back to the mouth of the gorge, until finally, abandoning his oars, and clinging close to the shore, he succeeded in dragging and jerking the boat past the strongest current by clinging to the clustering vines and thick, gnarled roots that lined the banks of the gorge. By these means he succeeded finally in passing the point that had caused Bill Ray such despair. His hands were torn and bleeding, and he was panting

from sheer exhaustion; but he had but a short distance now to go, and the rest of the way was comparatively easy rowing, although a strong current, setting lakewards, still opposed his progress.

At last he came in sight of the stock-yards, for the sake of whose inmates he had undertaken this perilous trip. There his worst apprehensions were realized. The yards were flooded, but as they were not in the direct path of the current, the force had not been sufficient to wash away the fences. Better for the poor imprisoned beasts if it had been. The maddened, frightened animals thus cooped up were swimming wildly to and fro, roaring and bellowing and bleating, and horning one another in their mad terror, until the whole scene seemed a picture worthy of Dante's "Inferno."

John Reynard now saw the immensity of his folly. He could open the gates for them in a second; but at what peril to himself! At the moment of opening them the maddened creatures would come upon him with such a rush that his own death was almost matter beyond speculation. There was but one chance—to open the gate suddenly, then steer close by the fence until he reached the gin, and there remain until the creatures had scattered in various directions.

That one plan he carried into execution. Slowly the great gates swung apart, but before the bewildered beasts fairly comprehended that they were liberated, a few swift strokes had secured their liberator safety on the platform of his gin. In his frightened eagerness he sprang upon the platform without securing his boat. He made one frantic effort to recover it, but it went bounding out of his reach with an air of mocking defiance that rendered the effort futile. He looked after it in consternation. Then his spirits rose again. "Never mind, I'm safely housed at least, and they'll send boats out after me if I am not there by breakfast." Thus consoling himself, Dr. Reynard threw himself upon the platform in a state of complete exhaustion.

"Only a few head lost, after all, and those sha'n't be mine. Gad! ain't I glad I persevered in coming on! And, Mr. Bill Ray, won't I settle accounts with you when I do catch you!" He closed his eyes. He would sleep now that he was safe, for he was most accursedly tired after all that pulling. He closed his eyes and slept. And while he slept there came slowly, slowly drifting toward the platform three great fallen trees, thrown pell-mell upon each other as if some giant of the woods had been playing jack-straws with them. Very slowly they drifted, as if meaning no ill; very noiselessly, as if loth to disturb the slumbers of him whom the gods had doomed to die at their hands. An hour was a short time for a very tired man to sleep, but it was all-sufficient to bring the slowly-floating mass closer and closer, until, with a mighty crash, it closed with the supporting timbers of the platform upon which the master of Aland had thrown himself to sleep.

With a wild cry of mortal agony he awoke.

Only five minutes lease of life were granted him in which to settle a long, long account of offenses against high Heaven! Then the relentless Samsons of the forest, carrying death and destruction in their own fall, bore him onward a corpse,—a mere thing,—of no more value than the wild weeds and broken planks and other débris that had collected in their branches in their resistless march.

"Though the mills of God grind slowly,
Yet they grind exceeding small;
Though with patience he stands waiting,
With exactness grinds he all,"—

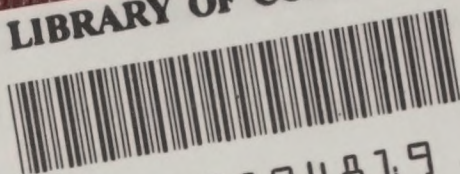
was Bertha Barrow's unspoken thought, when she returned to Aland, herself a happy wife, and found its sole occupant a broken, listless widow, a woman without joy in the present or hope for the future.

As Agnes Snowe had meted, so had it been measured unto her again.

THE END.

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